

BX

9225

D38

S7

86082

1887
MacMillan

CAVEN LIBRARY
KNOX COLLEGE
TORONTO



ANDREW BRUCE DAVIDSON

D.D., LL.D., D.LITT.





Photo: Moffatt, Edinburgh

A R Davidson

ANDREW BRUCE DAVIDSON

D.D., LL.D., D.LITT.

BY

JAMES STRAHAN, D.D.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXVII

CAVEN LIBRARY
KNOX COLLEGE
TORONTO

00-8545

TO
THE GOOLLY FELLOWSHIP
OF ALL NEW COLLEGE MEN



PREFACE

AFTER the death of Heinrich Ewald at Göttingen (May 4, 1875), Professor Davidson evidently had thoughts of giving an introductory lecture at the New College on the great scholar who had been his most inspiring teacher. His intention was not carried out, for what he wrote is a mere fragment, but the opening words will serve well as a preface to the present Memoir. 'Ewald's Life,' he says, 'has not yet been written, and perhaps never will be written. The lives of scholars afford few materials for biographies such as idle people love to read. These are spent in retirement, and though they often contain histories of profound interest, they are in the main mental histories, and few but the men themselves are aware of them; and, knowing that every thinking mind has a history as well as their own, there are but few who consider the vicissitudes of their own inner life of sufficient importance to be made known to the world. In some cases, indeed,

revolutions in thought assume a national magnitude. The changes in progress, though going on in men's minds, are shared by so many at once, that the movement manifests itself externally and acquires a public interest. And then the meaning of the movement, with the springs that set it a-going and the goal towards which it was directed, can best be seen in the history told by itself of some mind which, being highly sympathetic and impressionable, felt the agitations of the movement most profoundly and exhibited its characteristics most boldly. Such a case was that of the Oxford Movement, as shown in the history of his own mind by J. H. Newman.'

As we read these words we inevitably apply them to the writer himself, though he would have smiled sceptically at the idea, and doubtless was the last man to project an *apologia pro vita sua*. It is certain that he lived through such a time of stress and strain as he has indicated; that he was the foremost and in many ways the best British exponent of critical methods and ideas; that he not only witnessed but helped to bring about far-reaching changes in the theological world. And perhaps it is just because he was

the most self-suppressing of men, who was never heard to say *Quorum pars magna fui*, that his Church and country demand some fuller record of his intellectual and spiritual growth, some clearer mirror of his mind. At first the difficulties in the way of a Life seemed insuperable. One knew that few of the ordinary materials of biographies would come to hand. It was not to be supposed that such a man kept a journal or habitually unbosomed himself in letters to friends. But then, on the other hand, there was the fact that scarcely any teacher of our time made so profound an impression upon so many ardent minds, and ere long it began to seem not wholly impossible, with such helps as were freely offered from many quarters, to present a lifelike portrait of the master as we knew him.

Dr. Taylor Innes's sketch of his life, excellent as far as it went, contained some errors, and was necessarily defective on certain sides, especially in reference to the Critical Movement. And fresh reasons for a fuller treatment have been constantly emerging. In the Lives of nearly all the foremost Scottish Free Church scholars and preachers which have appeared in recent years—

for example, those of Elmslie, Drummond, John Watson, Rainy, and Robertson Smith—the figure of Davidson, silent, wistful, elusive, comes on the scene and disappears, leaving, I believe, in the mind of every reader a yearning desire to meet him again and to know him better. And the last two biographies named really make it imperative that more should be written regarding him. A very clear-headed schoolmaster, writing from the Schoolhouse of Ruthwell, speaks for many besides himself when he says of Davidson : ‘I cannot make up my mind whether Carnegie Simpson means to praise or blame in his references in *Principal Rainy*. I think he means blame.’ One may or may not agree with that, but the fact that widely different impressions can be received makes it evident that something more still needs to be said. And in the excellent *Life of Robertson Smith*, the one thing which the reader misses, and for which in the end his heart literally aches, is some tribute of gratitude and affection from the great scholar to his acknowledged master, something to place beside the glowing words of Elmslie, Harper, Skinner, John Watson, and G. A. Smith. Page after page assures us of Davidson’s admiration

for Smith, but the book leaves the impression, which must, I feel, be wrong, that Smith became somewhat cold towards his great teacher. The writers will, I hope, forgive me for pointing out this defect, and in the present Life they will find nothing, for I know nothing, which would suggest that Davidson ever wavered in his loyalty or cooled in his affection for the most brilliant scholar he ever attracted to Semitic studies.

In writing this book I have been indebted first to Davidson's executors, who put into my hands all his remaining lectures, sermons, and other papers. I am under a peculiar debt of gratitude to his niece, Mrs. Ogilvie—the Helen of this book—who took a warm interest in the proposed Memoir of her uncle, and wrote for me a number of letters regarding her long companionship with him. I had just finished the concluding chapter when I learned, to my great sorrow, that her life here was ended on September 13th. I also most cordially thank all the students and friends of Professor Davidson—too many to name—who have sent me their vivid reminiscences. And I am grateful to the editor of the *British Weekly*, who inserted in his paper a little note which

brought me letters from strangers in the ends of the earth. And I should add that two of Dr. Davidson's most intimate friends, Dr. G. W. Thompson and Dr. Taylor Innes, became my friends in their old age, and from them I received not a few of the memories and impressions which are here recorded.

J. S.

COLLEGE AVENUE,
LONDONDERRY,
Christmas 1916.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER I	
THE BOY	I
CHAPTER II	
THE ARTS STUDENT	23
CHAPTER III	
THE SCHOOLMASTER	44
CHAPTER IV	
THE DIVINITY STUDENT	52
CHAPTER V	
THE PROBATIONER	72
CHAPTER VI	
THE TUTOR	82
CHAPTER VII	
THE PROFESSOR	90

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRITIC	.	.	.	.	.	.	PAGE 100
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------

CHAPTER IX

THE GRAMMARIAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	115
----------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER X

THE TEACHER	.	.	.	.	.	.	129
-------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XI

THE MASTER	.	.	.	.	.	.	144
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XII

THE PREACHER	.	.	.	.	.	.	171
--------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRITER	.	.	.	.	.	.	196
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XIV

THE HUMAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	221
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XV

THE SILENT	.	.	.	.	.	.	232
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLAYER	.	.	.	.	.	.	253
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

CONTENTS

xv

CHAPTER XVII

	PAGE
THE SCHOLAR	275

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHURCHMAN	294
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX

THE AGED	304
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER I

THE BOY

EDUCATIONAL reformers, inside Parliament and out of it, contend that Knox's Ladder, or something like it, must be set up in every parish of Great Britain and Ireland. They mean that the cunning divisions which class jealousy and ignorance have stereotyped in the past must be destroyed, and that 'the lad o' pairts' who enters the elementary school shall pass from stage to stage as far as his abilities carry him, and shall reach the university without the consciousness of any rupture with his past, or of any transition from one social scale to another, least of all with any sense of having passed into a select or privileged circle. This is the system which, first conceived in the brain of Knox, has given to his country that tradition of scholarship which is her glory and the source of her power. And it is well with every nation which throws the careers

open to the talents, resolved that there shall be no more predestination to obscurity, and a limit to the cheerless talk about flowers wasting their sweetness on the desert air.

The Ladder was set up in the north-east of Scotland—that province which juts elbow-like out into the cold North Sea—some centuries ago. This fact is naturally emphasised in the *History of Aberdeen and Banff*,¹ which is perhaps the finest of the *County Histories of Scotland*. The writer of that book keeps his best wine to the last. Having stirred the reader's imagination with tales of Comyns and Keiths and Gordons, monks and reivers and smugglers, soldiers of fortune and empire-makers, he devotes a few vivid pages to Aberdeen scholars—Latinists, Hellenists, and Orientalists—ending with some reflections on the 'influence of education.' It appears that a Royal Commission, which did its work in 1875, found that in these counties 'eighty-five per cent. of the teachers were Masters of Arts, while elsewhere not one in fifty was a graduate; that there were few schools in which the higher branches of education were not taught;

¹ William Watt. Blackwood and Sons, 1900.

and that thus the steady flow of youthful ability from the country schools into the university, and from the university into the learned professions, had been greatly promoted. The ambition for university education was more widely prevalent in the north-east than elsewhere, and the means of giving effect to it existed in the parish schools and bursary system, which was more fully developed in Aberdeen than at other seats of learning. In the University of Aberdeen at the present time the bursaries, scholarships, and prizes, exclusive of ordinary class prizes, number over 350, their annual value being nearly £8000. Education may accordingly be regarded as the most distinctive of the industries of Aberdeen, and the yearly output of disciplined minds as the most important of its products. And thus it is true to-day, as it was five or six generations ago, that the "natural ingenuity" of the inhabitants is improved by education, at once accessible and effective, along the whole line from the elementary to the higher academic stages; and the shires of Aberdeen and Banff continue to send far more than their proportionate number of men into the learned profes-

sions and the higher grades of the public service throughout the Empire.' ¹

That is the plain prose of it, while the romance is found in the stories of George Macdonald and the poems of Walter Smith.² One of the novelist's many fair women is Mrs. Forbes of Howglen, who is no dream but a reality. Many readers of the tale feel that they need no introduction to Alec's mother, for they have known her all their life. Like Margaret Ogilvie, she is not one in a thousand but one of a thousand. It is of course her first and chief ambition to give her son a good education. 'Now in Scotland education is more easily got than almost anything else.'³ The Edinburgh poet-preacher begins his *Borland Hall*⁴ with the words :

There's an old University town
Between the Don and the Dee,
Looking over the grey sand dunes,
Looking out on the cold North Sea.

In that town you can hear

Kirk and college keeping time,
Faith and learning, chime for chime ;

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 385 f.

² The one graduated at King's College in 1845, and the other at Marischal College in 1841.

³ *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, p. 146. ⁴ W. C. Smith, *Poems*, p. 87.

and from it there comes home a youth welcomed
as proudly as any Olympian victor :

From the old University town
Looking out on the cold North Sea,
He carried high honours down
To his home in the hill country :
And proud was the mother that bore him then,
Though little she said, for that was her way.

And all the village and all the glen rejoiced with
her, for

They liked the youth ; and learning still
Is more esteemed among the folk
Who till the glebe, or watch the flock,
In lonely glen, or silent hill,
Than wealth of gold.

All the homely prose, and also not a little of the
romance and poetry, of life in that north country,
which is 'dark and true and tender,' will be found
in the story of Andrew Davidson, who would
never have been heard of in the outer world if
his foot had not been placed on the first steps of
the Ladder of Education, which it may not be
profane to compare with that ancient mystic
Ladder of Faith, whereon the angels of God
ascended and descended.

Andrew's home was the little farmhouse of
Kirkhill, in the parish of Ellon, where he was

born on April 25, 1831. The name Kirkhill perhaps keeps the memory of a church in pre-Reformation times. The farm lies about three miles to the north of the village, a little to the left of the main road from Aberdeen. An old neighbour, who was often in the house as a child, describes it as 'a wee little thacket hoosie.' 'I remember it,' says Helen, 'only as a sleeping place for the "men,"'¹ but the new house seemed to me very comfortable.' The farm of Kirkhill has a sunny exposure on the southern side of the watershed which divides the region drained by the Ugie—Buchan proper, 'a treeless land where beeves are good'—from the pleasant and fertile Vale of Ythan. From the house itself one has a very wide view to south and west; while the crest of a hill behind, which one can climb in twenty minutes, commands, in addition to a glimpse of the sea, one of the finest prospects in the whole country, with the noble contour of Benachie in the centre, and the rich lands of Formantine and Garioch rising through Strathbogie and Mar to the highest tracts in the United Kingdom, culminating in the summits,

¹ Called in some other parts of Scotland the 'hinds.'

snow-white nearly all the year round, of the Cairngorm range. And somewhere near the centre of the picture is the battlefield of Harlaw, where the Aberdeenshire men, under the Earl of Mar and the Provost of Aberdeen, saved Scotland from the invasion of Celtic barbarism. The boy who daily enjoyed that prospect knew the meaning of 'a land of far distances,' and his heart could never cease to be thrilled when he lifted up his eyes to the hills. I have twice, on summer days, feasted mine on the view, and on both occasions been involuntarily reminded of another view twice enjoyed—the Holy Land seen from the brow of the hill that rises above Nazareth, with Mount Gilead and the Jordan valley in the east, the plain of Jezreel in the south, and the Great Sea in the west. The influence of such an environment upon a sensitive lad can scarcely be exaggerated. In a chapter on 'A Hebrew Boy's Education,' Sir William Ramsay asks how far any young Jew of Nazareth was trained to appreciate the inspiration of that wonderful scene which was always open to him within half an hour's walk from his own door, and holds that we cannot hesitate about the

answer. No education was ever so well adapted to train a thoughtful child in the appreciation of his own country, to render its past history living and real to him, to strengthen his patriotic feeling, as the training which a Hebrew child then received.¹ And may we not reverently compare with the influences of Nature and of history upon a Galilean Child, the not dissimilar influences upon an impressionable Scottish boy? Andrew felt to the end of his life the spell of the sweet and gracious memories which circle round a childhood in the country. Most of his days were spent in town and among books, but it was never hard to persuade him to come back to the fields and woods where Nature had been his teacher.

He was by birth and breeding a thorough Buchan boy, yet it meant not a little to him that his parents had come from the south. His father, Andrew senior, who was very tall and fair, was born in Forfarshire, apparently at Airlie, the land of the Ogilvies, as Helen, who married an Ogilvie, was told. 'He had a sooth country tongue,' I learned from an old Ellon

¹ *The Education of Christ*, p. 59 f.

farmer who knew him well in boyhood; 'I liket to hear it, though it was sae different frae oor ain. I used to notice it even in the wye he spak to his horses.' Coming north to Aberdeenshire, he had first rented and worked a quarry belonging to Sir William Seton of Pitmedden, in Udny. Many years afterwards, when Andrew the son, as a young Professor, visited Pitmedden, he was taken by Sir William out for a walk and shown the quarry which had once been wrought by his father. The quarryman was well over forty when he married Helen Bruce, who had as a girl come from Midlothian to live with her relatives in the parish of Tarves. An accident brought his quarrying to a sudden end. 'Working one day at the upper ledge of rock, he let the heavy iron lever slip from him. Clutching the end of it, he shouted to the men below to escape from danger, and held on himself with one hand till he fell headlong into the quarry.'¹ When he recovered from his injuries, he leased the little farm of Kirkhill. There, too, he had his difficulties. 'My grandfather,' says Helen, 'had a struggle at first, as I think the farm was dear

¹ Taylor Innes.

and there was a deal of land to take in and cultivate.'

Six children were born at Kirkhill, first three sons, William, Alexander, and Thomas, then two daughters, Jean and Mary, and finally Andrew. Twice the shadow of death fell on the home, for Alexander, a very bright and gifted lad, who wrote verses for the local papers, was carried off by rapid decline at the age of twenty-one; and Mary, who was two years older than Andrew, also died young. The climate of Buchan, as George Macdonald says, 'has the character of *bracing*, but can be such, I imagine, only to those who are pretty well braced already; the delicate of all sorts, I think, it must soon brace with the bands of death.'

The year in which Andrew was born was notable in both State and Church, for it was the year in which the Reform Bill was passed in Parliament, and in which Thomas Chalmers succeeded Andrew Thompson as the leader of the Evangelical Party in Scotland. By the time the child knew to 'refuse the evil and choose the good,' his native parish was one of the storm centres of the 'Ten Years' Conflict.

'I like to see the mothers of the men I like,' says Dr. John Brown. Andrew's mother, who loved him more than her own soul, and whose influence over him in the formative years of his life cannot be exaggerated, is described by all who remember her as a Spartan. She was much more than that, but we may accept the description, and recall the words of Andrew's lifelong friend, James Donaldson, who says in his book on *Woman*: 'The Spartans wanted strong men: the mothers therefore must be strong. The Spartans wanted brave men: the mothers therefore must be brave. The Spartans wanted resolute men—men with decision of character: the mothers must be resolute. They believed, with intense faith, that as are the mothers, so will be the children. And they acted on this faith.'

To the Spartan virtues Helen Bruce added the graces of Christian motherhood. She is thus described by the granddaughter who inherited her name: 'I remember her first as the mistress of Kirkhill, when my uncle William was not married. I was a little girl then, and went to visit her with my father and mother. She was

a very little woman, with small hands and feet, and she walked, I thought, in a graceful way. She wore a plain mutch¹ with frills in those days, and when she was dressed she wore a widow's cap. She was very dark, and her hair never became grey. I always thought her very severe, but that may have been a child's idea. I never heard her laugh aloud, and she said she never read novels. I afterwards visited her with uncle Andrew, and I always picture her reading her New Testament, from which she seemed to get a great deal of comfort. At these times uncle went into her room and sat with her, and so did I. She always called God "her Maker." She was not talkative, but uncle and she used to talk. One day she must have said something about thinking, for I remember him saying, "Ah, the less you think the better!" To which she answered, "What, be like the brute beasts?" To me she said, "You're nae ill-lookin', Helen; I hope you may be good." "She is rather doubtful about that," said uncle.'

'My uncle,' writes Helen in another letter, 'never once indicated to me that he had suffered

¹ G. *Mütze*, med. L. *almutia*, F. *aumusse*

poverty in his boyhood. My father told me that they killed their own "mairt" and pigs, which does not look as if they had suffered.' In this connection an amusing story is told. At an important event like the killing of the 'mairt'—or fatted calf—which was often divided with a neighbouring family, everybody was sure to be present, and as some one might blanch at the sight of blood there was an excuse for the presence of strong waters. At any rate the executioner required to be treated. On one occasion Thomas Gall had done his duty, and a glass had just been handed to him, when he noticed little Andrew, a child of five, standing beside him, and, putting the glass to the boy's lips, he poured some of the fiery liquid down his throat. Choking and spluttering, Andrew cried out, 'Ye've pisened me, Tammas Ga'!' For an instant the laugh was against the child, but, quick as thought, he turned its edge. Facing his tormentor, he exclaimed, 'Pisen me again, Tammas Ga'!' The laugh was now loud and long on the other side. For the moment Thomas stood in gaping silence, but next day he saw the joke, and he continued to see it, and others

made him remember it, during the rest of his life. Is the gift of self-defence, the sharp sense of men's weak spots, the eye for the ridiculous side of things, inborn? At any rate Andrew had it from his childhood upwards. *Nemo me impune lacessit.*

Those who enjoyed Professor Davidson's more intimate talk, remember that he sometimes spoke with satisfaction of the fact that he was baptized by Robertson of Ellon. He was never slow to acknowledge his debt to the famous preacher and Church leader, whose voice he heard every Sunday in the parish kirk. 'Mark the head,' wrote Hugh Miller in one of his pen-and-ink sketches; 'it is of large capacity and formidable development. The features are not handsome; but in their rudely blocked massiveness there are evidently indications of coarse vigour. He speaks, and the voice seems as uncommon as the appearance of the man. He might address in the open air eight or ten thousand people. We have before us the redoubtable Mr. Robertson of Ellon—the second name and first man of his party, the leader of the forlorn hope of Moderatism.'

But the essential fact regarding him is that while he was moderate in politics, he was evangelical in faith, and it was his supreme service to his country that, while he remained in the Established Church at the Disruption, he did so much to impart his own evangelical fervour to that Church. During the long fight between Church and State he welcomed Chalmers on at least two occasions to his manse and pulpit in Ellon. In Hanna's *Memoirs* there is a delightful account of a trip which they made together to the Busters of Buchan, where they 'scooted down the brae,' launched a boat, and rowed under the great archway. Chalmers then wished to 'complete his conquest of the Busters' by a walk round an extremely narrow ledge on the top of the cliffs, but Robertson threatened to lay violent hands on him, keeping him alive for greater triumphs.¹

Another welcome guest in the Ellon manse was Alexander Duff, who had come home from India on his first furlough in 1835. 'From that time Robertson's views on many subjects manifested a change. Not that he would attempt to date his conversion at that period . . . But the

¹ Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers*, vol. iv. p. 79 f.

conversation of the great missionary, so full of ardent zeal and philosophical knowledge, roused in the kindred spirit of the country minister that burning desire to spread the gospel, which grew with every day of his life. He was so much impressed by the necessity and the importance of missions, that he seriously considered whether he ought not to demit his charge at Ellon, and go out to India as a missionary.' ¹

In the great congregation which filled the village church every Sunday morning, and listened to the 'minister himsel,' or it might be to some illustrious stranger, was the youngest child of the family at Kirkhill, whose mind was very early fired with the desire for knowledge, stimulated thereto by the fond mother to whom he was a Benjamin. Robertson was famous all over the district as a catechiser, and it is on record that Andrew gained a prize for repeating the Catechism from beginning to end without a mistake. Considering that there are one hundred and seven questions and answers in the Shorter Catechism—which is 'for such as are of weaker capacity'—this was, apart from anything else, a remarkable

¹ A. H. Charteris, *A Faithful Churchman*, p. 29 f.

feat of memory. As a compendium of instruction, a catechism differs from a creed or confession in not being, in the first instance, either an act of worship or a profession of faith. It is now generally preceded by something better adapted to the child mind, and the Calvinism of the Westminster divines doubtless needs some revision. But that this manual has been astonishingly effective in training the mind and developing the character of Scottish Presbyterians is a fact beyond dispute. And some great thinkers, who are no believers in election and reprobation, confess that they 'are not sorry that they were educated at a time when the pressure of Calvinism forced them early to begin to think of great questions as to the nature and destiny of man.'¹

In secular knowledge Andrew had an excellent instructor in Mr. Hay of Tillydesk, whose school—now a farm stable—was two miles farther north than Kirkhill. Hay was lame and very awkward in his gait, but wonderfully active in mind. A self-made man of varied accomplishments, he was also an elder in the parish kirk of Ellon, whither he rode down every Sunday on his

¹ Edward Caird, *Memoir of Principal Caird*, p. lxxxix.

'sheltie.' Later on he had a difference with his minister, gave up schoolmastering, and became an analyst of manures in the city of Aberdeen. He it was who drilled Andrew in the rudiments of Latin, and he used to boast, not without reason, that he had made a scholar of him. In his schooldays Andrew was sent in the morning hours to herd the cows on the farm. But he could never have been a farmer, partly because his mother, whose will was law to him, had far different plans for her youngest child, and partly because his father had no patience with his ways on the farm. 'Andrew,' the male parent indignantly declared, 'is the worst herd I ever had, for while he is thinking only of his books the cattle are sure to be eating the corn.' But any reader who takes the father's words at their face value does not yet know much of the inner workings of the Scottish mind. Every tiller of the soil in those parts is secretly elated when he finds that one or other of his sons is clearly predestined to another calling than his own, and if you could look at the other side of the father's impatience, you would see the image of a great hope which even a peasant heart may cherish.

While Andrew was designed for other work than that of the farm, he had an eye for all the poetry of Nature, and his mind was unconsciously filled with her parables. In later years one easily knew where he was in imagination when he depicted the blade passing into the stalk and ear, and the yellow tinge showing itself here and there, until all was one blaze of gold. And 'not only through the week, but even on the Sabbath the husbandman's mind will fall at times upon his fields ; and after returning from the House of God, he will sometimes in the still Sabbath eve, when the sun sends his slanting rays across the earth, and the voices of the flock are heard answering one another from hillside to hillside, saunter along the edge of his fields, and, as he surveys them, be filled with thankfulness or concern.' And such is the heart of ' the Heavenly Husbandman.' ¹

Andrew was not the diary-keeping boy who registers solemn vows that in a dozen specified ways he will be good. But he must have felt that, in Wordsworth's phrase, ' vows were made for him.' When he came to man's estate, no

¹ *Waiting upon God*, p. 211.

scholar had less difficulty in understanding, or greater power in interpreting, the prophet who was consecrated to God even before his birth.¹ All the instinctive reverence and all the native refinement of a Christian home were the heritage of his boyhood and youth. In a reminiscent mood he once told a friend that as he came home from Tillydesk school, shocked and disgusted by the language of his companions, he made up his mind never to swear. In later days he disliked the politer forms of profanity even more than the coarser sort. 'When he first came to Edinburgh,' says a veracious correspondent, 'he was asked to a house in which the men swore, and he never went back.'

There was as much food for the boy's mind in his home as in the school and the church. His father, 'a very decided character, fond of an argument,'² was an ardent admirer of Burns, knew the best poems by heart, and delighted to recite them. His brother Alick, who had the spirit of poetry, was a stimulating influence while he lived, and a quickening memory when he died. Their mother loved the best of all poetry, the

¹ Jeremiah i. 4, 5.

² James Duguid.

Psalms of the Old Testament and the parables of the New. Andrew thus became a lover of the poets from his childhood. His distinguished pupil, Andrew Harper, who has carried the spirit of the New College into the Commonwealth of Australia, once chanced to say to him, 'It is a regret to me that I was so late in life in appreciating Shakespeare.' 'Ah!' was the answer, 'I have loved Shakespeare ever since I was a boy of twelve.'

It was when he was twelve, too, that the most dramatic event in the church history of Scotland took place. Before it occurred, the family at Kirkhill, like nearly every household in the land, had to make their choice, and for them the decision was far from easy. Much as they honoured their evangelical minister, they could not help questioning whether he was quite true to his own principles. The voices of Duff and Chalmers rang in their ears, and the arguments of *The Witness*, which went everywhere, were irresistible. The mother, with her quick intuitions, was the first to make up her mind. The father, with his labouring logic, was slower, and his final conflict more memorable. 'Refusing on the one

hand to join in the exultation of the majority of the parish, who boasted that at last the Church would have to yield to force, refusing on the other to be swayed by the tears and entreaties of his wife, the still, strong man locked himself into the stable, and spent hours of solitary self-surrender and prayer. But when he at last opened that shut door, the question was settled for him and his family.' ¹

¹ Taylor Innes.

CHAPTER II

THE ARTS STUDENT

WILLIAM HAY the teacher and Helen Bruce the mother of the clever Kirkhill boy demanded that he should have the chance of a university education, and they had their way. In the spring of 1845 it was decided that Andrew, now just fourteen, should go to the Grammar School of Aberdeen to prepare himself for the Bursary Competition at Marischal College. About half a century before, that school had George, Lord Byron, among its pupils. The old building is no longer in existence, having been superseded by a spacious modern edifice in the west end of the city, but the street in which it stood is still called the Schoolhill. Andrew had never been in Aberdeen before, and his first view of the twin towers of Old Machar made an indelible impression on his memory, while the peculiarly homeless feeling which every country lad experiences as he wanders alone for the first time in a big city was

in his case intensified by a piece of singularly bad luck. Before his first day away from home was ended, he knew the meaning of the words 'perils of robbers.' His mother had rented a little garret for him in the Gallowgate, and the furniture for the tiny apartment was entrusted to the Ellon carrier ; but it never arrived, bed, blankets, and everything else having, it was said, been seized by highway thieves. Here was an awkward plight for a lad of fourteen to be in. Had the Scottish climate been less rigorous, he might have spent the first night of his pilgrimage on the Broad Hill of Aberdeen, with a stone for his pillow, and made the place his Bethel. That being impossible, he did the next best thing. After wandering about for hours, he found his way to the University 'Guest Room,' a comfortable hostel provided by the authorities for lads who had not yet secured quarters for themselves. There he slept for some nights, until other furniture was sent from the home village and his own little room made ready to receive him.

At the Grammar School Andrew entered the Fourth Class, the next to the highest, and at once came under the influence of Dr. James Melvin, who

was the finest Latinist Aberdeen had produced since the days of Arthur Johnston and Thomas Ruddiman. Born of parents as poor as Andrew's, he had climbed the Ladder. 'Melvin,' says David Masson, another of his pupils, 'it is now the deliberate conviction of many besides myself, was at the head of the Scottish Latinity of his day. How he had attained to his consummate mastery of the Latin tongue and literature, how indeed, amid the rough and hasty conditions of Scottish intellectual life, there could be bred a Latin scholar of his supreme type at all, is somewhat of a mystery. . . . His scholarship must have been the result of an amount of reading for himself utterly unusual in his neighbourhood. The proof of this exists in the superb library, one of the wonders of Aberdeen, which, even with his moderate means, he had managed to collect for himself. There was nowhere in that part of Scotland, probably nowhere in all Scotland, another private library of the classic writers and of all commentaries, lexicons, scholiasts, and what not, appertaining to them. . . . Among these Latin classics he had read, till, at the time of his appointment to the Grammar School Rectorship, his knowledge of Latinity was

probably more extensive, original, deep, subtle, and delicate than that of any other scholar within the limits of Great Britain. . . . Never did Melvin leave a passage of peculiar beauty of thought, expression, or sound, without rousing us to a sense of its peculiarity, and impressing it upon us by reading the passage himself, eloquently and lovingly, so as to give effect to it. . . . Perhaps it was in expounding his favourite Horace that he rose oftenest to what may be called the higher criticism. It was really beautiful to hear him dissect a passage in Horace, and then put it together again, thrillingly complete. Once or twice he would delight us by the unexpected familiarity of an illustration of a passage by a parallel passage from Burns. On the whole, however, Melvin's teaching was strictly philological. His aim was, by the intense accuracy of our reading in a well-arranged course of progressive difficulty, both to drill us to accuracy in all intellectual matters whatever, and to put us in perfect possession of the instrument of Latin, should we care afterwards to use it for ourselves.' ¹

Andrew was no more than fourteen when he

¹ *Memories of Two Cities*, pp. 251-261.

first came under the sway of this famous master, whose pupil he remained for only a couple of terms, yet there can be little doubt that the impact of that half-year's tuition upon his mind was one of the determining factors in his career, and that he more than any other boy who ever passed through the old Grammar School was destined to continue the Melvin traditions. Genius, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth, and both Melvin and Davidson were scholars by the grace of God. It is a tragic thing when a father, who wishes to give his son the best education that gold can procure, finds his purpose thwarted by that which the Master of Ballantrae called 'the malady of not wanting.' It is still more tragic when a lad who has a hunger and thirst for knowledge is baffled by the adverse fate which has made his parents poor. It is Scotland's distinction among the nations of the earth that, defying fate, she discovers, cherishes, and perfects the genius of her sons.

During his two terms at the Grammar School, and all through his four sessions at college, Andrew received a fortnightly box or hamper from home, containing provisions from the farm

—cakes, butter, eggs, potatoes, ham, cheese, and so forth—along with his clean linen. In general it would be brought in to him by the carrier, but his mother, always eager to see him, often went with it herself in the stage-coach, and it is a tradition, cherished not only in the family but in the whole countryside, that the brave little woman would sometimes take a creel on her back and walk the whole way to town—nearly twenty miles—and hand her son the coach fare which she had thus saved.

Before the Bursary Competition at Marischal College in October 1845, Andrew entered his name as a candidate. Grammar School boys will appreciate the fact that he had only been in the Fourth Class. If he had chosen to wait another year,¹ and to compete as a Fifth Class scholar, it is very likely that he would have taken the foremost place in most of his college classes, while another year's experience would have enabled him to do fuller justice to some of the subjects in the curriculum. As it was, he gained a bursary of £11, when the highest was only £13. In spite

¹ W. R. Smith was fifteen when he entered King's College as first Bursar,

of his extreme youth he determined to go on, and the high places which he took in all his four years seem to indicate that after all he made no mistake in his decision.

It was about the beginning of his college course that his love for his mother prompted him to add her surname of Bruce to his own baptismal name, whereby he became known, and will always be remembered, as A. B. Davidson. Such an addition to one's name is not uncommon in Scotland, where 'by law a man may take a name or make a name.'¹ Mr. Crockett the novelist, for instance, added Rutherford to his baptismal name of Samuel. Andrew and Bruce were great Scottish names to live up to, and in his mental as well as physical accents Davidson was, and remained, a genuine Scotsman. It would be ludicrous, however, to imagine that when he assumed the name of Bruce he ever gave a thought to the most illustrious bearer of that name. His only desire was to gratify the mother who bore him, and to bind himself never to do anything unworthy of a Bruce like her.

At college Andrew made an unusual number of

¹ Taylor Innes.

lifelong friends, some of them town boys, others country lads like himself, all of them singularly attractive and lovable comrades.

We had been gathered from cot and grange,
From the moorland farm, and the terraced street,
Brought together by chances strange,
And knit together by friendships sweet.¹

James Donaldson, who was born in Aberdeen a day after Andrew was born in Ellon, did much to stimulate a kindred mind, and his early success as the author of the *Modern Greek Grammar* fired his friend's ambition to render a similar service to the cause of Hebrew scholarship. William Cormack, a native of Chapel of Garioch, at the back of Benachie, who has spent his life as a preacher to the Dutchmen of South Africa, and who is now over ninety, writes from his home in Rondebosch a fine appreciation of his friend, ending with the words 'Care A. B. Davidson, Nulla dies unquam memori te eximet aevo,'² which we may translate, 'Dear A. B. D., no length of days shall ever blot thee from the memory of time.' A third comrade, Charles Michie, became Rector of Silver Street Academy, Aberdeen, and died in the end of 1915.

¹ Walter C. Smith, *Poems*, p. 229.

² Virgil, ix. 447.

Some months before his death he let me interview him regarding his friend, and began the talk with an infinitely longing 'Andrew !' From him I learned that Davidson was very popular among his fellow-students ; that, while he was a diligent scholar, and successful in every subject, his work never seemed to burden him ; that in his talk there was a characteristic note of sarcasm ; that he was always ready for an outing in the country, or a walk along the sea-shore ; ready for a discussion in his room ; and, especially, ready to help less gifted men with their next day's tasks and problems. A fourth friend, A. C. Cameron,¹ who also died in 1915, wrote of him thus : ' In the Latin, Greek, and Mathematical Classes, under Professor Blackie, the Rev. Dr. Brown, and Dr. Cruickshank respectively, we sat in the order of our Christian names, so my place was next to his. An attack of typhoid fever broke his attendance in the first session. Throughout the four years, out of seventy in the class, he stood about fourth all round in the order of merit, and graduated with honours. . . . It is for me

¹ Dr. Cameron was Schoolmaster of Fettercairn and afterwards Secretary of the Teachers' Association of Scotland.

to testify that throughout his early life and our frequent intercourse I never heard him utter a word that savoured of irreverence or of things that were not just and true, pure and lovely.'

No less attractive than his college friendships was his singular love of little children. "This, I guess," wrote an aged Aberdonian, "may account for the great attraction which Andrew Davidson's attic had for my nephew, the late W. A. Hunter,¹ when he was a bairn. When he began to toddle about, his mother, to get him out of the way, would bring him to his grandmother to look after him. This she could easily do as long as the door was shut, but whenever it was left open the child was off, and up the stairs he crawled to Andrew Davidson. When the mother came to take him home, if she did not see him with his grandmother, she did not need to ask where he was. She might say, 'I'm afraid Andrew must think Willie a perfect nuisance.' 'You need not think so,' her mother would reply, 'for if he did he need not let him in when he knocks at the door, for you know the little one can't open it himself, and, young as

¹ Afterwards Professor of Roman Law at University College, London, and M.P. for North Aberdeen.

he is, he would soon know were Andrew not to let him see that he was always welcome.'"¹ Hunter was born on May 8, 1844, and these infantile visits may have begun in the winter of 1846.

Aberdeen had much more to give to a student than secular knowledge. When Andrew came to attend the Grammar School and University, he found himself in the flood-tide of the Evangelical Movement. In the beginning of the century things had been very different. 'Nowhere in Scotland was there such a vast stone bed of uninterrupted Moderatism. . . . Uniformly the theology had come to be of the frigid kind; and in many parishes the doctrine expounded had come to have so faint a tincture of theology of any sort in it that, but for a few phrases and forms, any decent pagan who had read Marcus Aurelius would have answered for the parson.'² But a great change had passed over the city, largely as the result of the labours of Dr. Kidd, Professor of Oriental Languages in Marischal College and minister of Gilcomstone Chapel, who died when Andrew was a child of three. This famous

¹ Dr. (now Sir) G. A. Smith in the *Union Magazine*, 1902.

² David Masson, *Memories of Two Cities*, p. 216 f.

Irishman, born in County Down and reared by a pious mother in County Antrim, brought to the Granite City the spirit of Wesley and Whitfield. 'Anywhere in Scotland a mode of evangelical preaching so rich, hearty, and warm as Kidd's must have been from the first, would probably have then been an innovation; but in that Aberdeen region it must have been a marvel. And they heard him, these hard-headed Aberdonians heard him. . . . And among them for thirty years he laboured, thrice every Sunday administering to them, with warm Irish vehemence, some special bit of Biblical narrative or doctrine, till the whole city became in the main evangelical in its notions of doctrine, and the other pulpits in it were filled with men supplying similar doctrine after their various fashions, and only in the country round did Moderatism still prevail, though even there largely modified. All this was not owing to Kidd, for the *Zeitgeist* was at work, but much of it was owing to him. He was the flame at which many lit their candles.'¹

In Andrew's college days the great preacher to students was Dr. Alexander Dyce Davidson of

¹ David Masson, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-219.

the Free West Church, whose pulpit was a throne for nearly forty years. He was as cultured as he was evangelical, and what he did for hundreds of students is indicated by the words of one of them. Dr. Whyte writes : ' Dr. Davidson's preaching was a revelation to me of what the Sabbath pulpit could be made to a hungry and thirsty hearer. I worshipped in the Free West, forenoon and afternoon, every Sabbath year after year, and what a support and solace that pulpit was to me ! I see the stately dignity of the old Doctor as he climbs the pulpit stairs ; I hear and join in his opening prayer so rich and weighty with devotional Scripture ; I enjoy immensely the Bengel-like point and sententiousness of his comments on the chapter he reads ; and I sit fascinated under the ripe, strong, edifying lecture and sermon, and go home hiding in my heart his so direct and so commanding applications. Yes : how I enjoyed my every Sabbath during my student days in Aberdeen ! '

There is nothing that more surely wins the lifelong gratitude of a student from the country than the kindness of city friends who in some measure make up to him the loss of the social joys

of home. Early in his college days Andrew was introduced to Mrs. Garden of Crown Street, whose two little sons, afterwards distinguished as an advocate and a surgeon in the city, remained his friends through life. 'It was her habit to find out students from the country, and especially those who were studying for the ministry of the Free Church, and to invite them to her hospitable home. He had felt lonely at the University, and longed for such a friendship as Mrs. Garden so readily gave, and she, with her quickly discerning spirit, knew the fineness of his nature, the alertness of his mind, and the strength of his character, and opened her home to him. And when he recalled this long afterwards, nothing could be finer than the expression of his gratitude. His face beamed with a gracious thankfulness as he spoke of how much it then meant to him.' ¹

Meanwhile the family at Kirkhill were proud of their Collegian, or, as they say in those parts, Collegianer. Andrew's brother Thomas, who was six years his senior, and who died three years ago in his ninetieth year, was a quiet, modest man,

Rev. J. S. Stewart, minister of the North United Free Church, Aberdeen, formerly of Rathen.

whose chief happiness it was to be known, not for his own sake, but as the brother of a distinguished and honoured scholar. From an early age he devoted himself to the task of assisting that brother to pursue his life-work. When the younger lad was making his way at the University, the elder, at that time an apprentice blacksmith, was using his spare time in making iron toe-pieces for the heavy boots of the farm workers, so that he might contribute towards the cost of the college fees and lodgings of the student in Aberdeen. He afterwards, by his brother's help, became a farmer, and gave his own children an excellent education. One of them, who went to London with a sixpence in his pocket, is now known in the markets and clubs of the City. He and his cousin, a Kirkhill boy who has become a distinguished naval doctor, often meet to compare notes. His eldest sister, Helen, became practically the adopted child of Professor Davidson, and her bright companionship was the chief joy of his somewhat lonely life.

While Andrew was a Prizeman in every Greek and Latin class, Mathematics was his strong subject. 'I became intimate with him,' writes

William Cormack, 'during his last year at Marischal College. He was then working hard at Mathematics with a view to competing for a scholarship. I was struck by his quick intelligence, and the ease with which he mastered geometrical problems. Even then I anticipated for him a famous career in life, but what seemed to draw us most together was the similarity of our circumstances. We had both to struggle hard to secure for ourselves a niche in the world's sphere of work.' In the mathematical class, taught by Professor Cruickshank, Andrew had a rival in William Mair, a lad from the Schoolhouse of Savoch, to the north of Ellon, who was a year his senior. In the third year Davidson was second and Mair third in this subject. It was at the end of the fourth year that the Mathematical Scholarship of £60 was open for competition. The best student, a man named Anderson, who afterwards became a schoolmaster, had been working at Mathematics a year longer than the others, and if he had competed he would no doubt have defeated both Davidson and Mair. But as he did not think it honourable to enter, the contest lay between the two Buchan boys, and Mair came off

victorious. He afterwards became minister of Earlston, as well as a great authority on Ecclesiastical Law, and he was chosen Moderator of the Church of Scotland in the same year in which the corresponding honour in the Free Church was offered to Professor Davidson. Dr. Mair still lives in greatly honoured old age in Edinburgh. He recently said to me with a smile that if he had not defeated Davidson in the scholarship competition, the latter would probably have become a Professor of Mathematics and been lost to Old Testament and Semitic learning. The hypothetical point may be left undecided. I would say 'possibly' rather than 'probably.' There are in every life might-have-beens which awaken a lively sense of gratitude, as well as others which occasion regret. It may well be doubted whether Andrew Davidson would ever have consented to give his life to the teaching of Algebra or Physics, and one trembles, on such a supposition, to imagine the thoughts of his mother. Still it cannot be denied that the disappointment, regarded as God's appointment, may have been one of the facts which helped to shape his destiny. Many of his students will recall the thrill with which

they listened to his great lecture on the 'Call of Jeremiah,' in which he says : ' When we are in something like the position of this prophet, undertaking a serious responsibility, and can recall things in our history which we cannot but regard as providential, determining our course in life, and leading us on towards the place which we are going to occupy, it does strengthen our hope that God is now calling us to this place. The things we remember may be small, indeed trifles ; but when we take a broad view of life, they acquire a greater magnitude. Our minds were, perhaps, fixed on a certain career in life, but in order to pursue it, it was necessary that we should gain some distinction in learning, or obtain some position, and we failed ; and the failure altered our whole career : and now we are where we are, about to enter upon a calling more sacred. Providences of this kind, being internal, strike us more readily ; and reflecting on them does enable us to find God in our life. Indeed, though we ordinarily overlook such things from want of thought, when we are led more seriously to consider our history, we find it full of them.' ¹

¹ *The Called of God*, p. 210 f.

Andrew's teacher of Latin at Marischal College was Professor John Stuart Blackie, who liked to think that his educational methods were better, and his ideals higher, than those of Melvin. The two men had been rival candidates for the newly instituted Chair of Humanity in 1839, and it was a cruel blow to Melvin, for whom the Chair had been popularly destined, when he was set aside by the Whigs who were then in office. In his *Notes of a Life* Blackie speaks somewhat ungenerously of the defeated man, who went on faithfully doing his duty in the Grammar School. 'The fact of the matter,' he says, 'really was that Melvin had damaged himself even as a scholar, by schoolmastering too much. . . . He narrowed his views down to version-making, and as a version-maker he lived and died.' In contrast to such mistaken methods Blackie speaks thus of his own: 'Though fond of languages, it was merely as the living vesture of thoughts that they were valuable to me. . . . I was at bottom a realist, and looked upon the learned languages as only the key to the most significant histories of man in past ages. My epiphany was thus a decided protest to the style of scholarship that had hitherto

prevailed in Aberdeen, in which Latin composition assumed a prominence that appeared to me neither reasonable in itself nor suitable to the age in which we live. By the great scholars of the sixteenth century Latin was taught only as the key to knowledge. . . . What I wanted was through Latin to awaken wide human sympathies, to enlarge the field of vision.'

As far as I know Blackie is the only disparager of Melvin, who somehow contrived to bequeath to his best pupils gifts for educating and disciplining the minds of the youth of Scotland which were never possessed by

A self-assertive Greek
Brisk to reason or jest.¹

All the same, Blackie was one of the most distinguished teachers, as well as one of the most interesting Scotsmen, of his time, and the point which I wish to emphasise is, that if we admire the ideal which he set before himself in Aberdeen, and mentally substitute 'Hebrew' for 'Latin,' we can scarcely find a truer description of the motives and aims by which Davidson, less from pedagogic theory than from spiritual instinct,

¹ Walter C. Smith, 'Altnacraig,' *Poems*, p. 360.

was habitually actuated during all the forty years of his tuition at the New College, in the first twenty of which Blackie was entertaining the Greek class at the University by the versatilities and eccentricities of his genius. As a teacher, Davidson blended all that was best in his two most famous masters, Melvin and Blackie. But he did not speak of his coming to the New College as an epiphany.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOLMASTER

WHEN A. B. Davidson graduated with Mathematical Honours in 1849, he was only eighteen—the age at which men begin to think of leaving Eton and Rugby for Oxford or Cambridge. His intimate friends assure us that they never had any doubt as to his intention to proceed ultimately to the Divinity Hall. But the time was not come for his making, or at least for his announcing, a definite decision. His one clear call in the meanwhile was to earn his bread, in doing which he would prepare for the next stage, whatever it might be. And fortune, or something much higher, favoured him now, as it did ever afterwards, when he had a new departure to make in this workaday world. His great life-tasks seemed to come to him almost unsought. He never knew the bitterness of the lagging hours in which the labourer, whether with brain or muscle, asks for work and cannot find it :

Still waiting with his heart on fire,
And wasting with his great desire,
Waiting and finding none to hire.¹

He was to have misfortunes enough in his life, but all of a different kind.

The Free Presbytery of Ellon offered him the charge of their school in the village of his native parish, and he accepted it. There he spent over three happy years. He was near his home, and could any day go up to see those whom he loved best. He had the dew of youth upon him, and was free from care. His days went swiftly past in congenial work, for he loved little children, and had the gift of holding their attention and winning their affection. And so well did he perform the routine duties of the school, that he gained the highest government grant every year. All the salary that the Presbytery allowed him was £60 a year, with a house of four rooms, two of which he used himself. It was not a princely income for an Honours Master of Arts, but it was enough. And the experience which the young teacher gained in the management of classes—the opportunity afforded him of applying the principles which he

¹ Walter C. Smith, *Poems*, p. 229.

had learned from Melvin—proved invaluable to him in after years. And the man who has once been a schoolmaster receives for life a stamp which belongs to nobody else. In Davidson's case this appeared in interesting ways. People used to wonder in later years that he could so quietly study in a room full of noisily romping children—for example, nephews and nieces, grand-nephews and grand-nieces—apparently quite unperturbed by the commotion around him. 'You forget,' he would say, 'that I once taught a school.'

Both then and in later days he had a curious way—half grave, half comical—of correcting a pupil. His little niece was reading one day in the Gospel of Luke, and came to the words 'many widows were in Israel.' For 'widows' Helen read 'windows.' 'Look again,' said her teacher. Still she said 'many windows in Israel.' 'Well, there are no *lums*!' ¹ Another time she was reading *Waverley* to him, and came upon the words 'fell among dragoons,' which she read as 'fell among dragons.' 'Surely not!' he said with mock horror. One thing made him really grave—any flippancy or irreverence in the use of sacred

¹ *Anglice*, chimneys.

words and names. He once sent little Helen out with his watch for repairs. She came back and cheerily announced, 'I've taken it to its maker.' Glancing at his face, she saw a spasm of pain. 'My Maker,' 'its Maker,' spoken very reverently, was his mother's habitual name for God, and an intentional jest with the word would have chilled him to the marrow of his bones. His expression quickly softened when he saw that the young girl was naïve and innocent. But she still remembered the look after half a century.

We are even more interested in his ways of spending his leisure hours during those years of schoolmastering. How did he occupy himself in 'the lang licht o' the Buchan nicht' in summer, and the equally long darkness of winter? Few young teachers, one fancies, could equal the following record of three years' private study. His friend A. C. Cameron has told us that after graduating they went together to Wilson's bookshop in Aberdeen, each to buy a Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. That was, in Davidson's case at least, the prime requisite, though as yet he could not foresee that Hebrew was to be his key to the temple of fame. But in addition to that,

he quietly laid in a stock of books which enabled him to acquire in those years a fair mastery of the principal languages of modern Europe—French, German and Italian, with a good deal more than a smattering of Spanish and Dutch. And it has been shrewdly surmised that ‘these years perhaps more than any others in his life were the years in which he made himself. Before they were ended he became a scholar.’¹ It is told of Joseph Justus Scaliger, ‘the greatest scholar of modern times,’ that his real education began ‘when he determined to teach himself. He read the Greek poets, orators and historians, forming a Grammar for himself as he went along. From Greek he proceeded to attack Hebrew, and then Arabic; of both he acquired a respectable knowledge, though not the critical mastery which he possessed in Latin and Greek. And as a teacher he was able not only to impart knowledge, but to kindle enthusiasm.’² Andrew Davidson was Scotland’s nineteenth-century Scaliger.

A class-fellow of his at Marischal College, James Johnstone, who became minister of Bel-

¹ Sir W. R. Nicoll in the *British Weekly*. Compare Sir G. A. Smith in *Union Magazine*, 1902.

² *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xxiv. p. 284.

helvie Free Church, said that 'one of the first things which brought his name to the front was a paper written by him in Ellon, which showed the great educationist he already was ; but those who knew him did not require to be told of his capabilities.' One could wish that the essay had been preserved. I can imagine that it laid less stress upon theories than upon personal qualities not so easy to acquire. Sometimes in later life, when asked how class management and discipline seemed so easy to him, he would merely answer, 'I have instincts.'

During these years he received visits from some of his college friends. 'One morning,' writes William Cormack, 'I walked out from Aberdeen to Ellon'—the twenty miles that Andrew's mother often walked—'and spent a few happy days with him, having some pleasant walks along the banks of the classic stream, the Ythan. He had now given up mathematics, and it was evident that his life's studies would be on the linguistic side.' In the autumn vacation of 1850 he joined his friend A. C. Cameron in a tour through the finest scenery of Scotland. This meant much in the education of a North Country

lad of nineteen, and we may reproduce the simple account of it which Dr. Cameron gave fifty years afterwards. 'As he had never been further south than Aberdeen, he readily joined me in a tour to see the country and to visit friends. We came first to Edinburgh, and on a walk along Princes Street he exclaimed, "Oh! what a grand city! How I should like to live in it!" We sailed up the Forth, spent some days among friends about Stirling and Falkirk; thence to Ayrshire, the land of Burns, and Arran. We sailed up Loch Lomond and down Loch Katrine, through the Trossachs to Callander, on foot to Lochearnhead and Killin, over the hills to my native Glenlyon, and still on to my home on the south side of Loch Rannoch, where we rested for a week. My friend proved a most interesting fellow-tourist, ever ready with apt quotations from Burns, Scott and other authors.'

It appears that this visit to Edinburgh had not a little to do with Davidson's determination, two years afterwards, to study Divinity in Edinburgh rather than Aberdeen, happy though he had been during his Arts days in the northern city. Ever after that autumn day in Princes Street,

the glamour of the Castle and the College at its foot was upon him. Besides, it counted for much to an imaginative youth that, though he was a pure Aberdonian, his mother's homeland was Midlothian. She had spent her girlhood in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, and it would have been strange indeed if she had not kindled her child's fancy with tales out of the city's romantic history. At any rate, it is clear that in everything which concerned his mental and spiritual development Andrew always knew the best thing to do. And thus his student life, now half over, was in the end to be a tale of two cities and a blend of two cultures.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIVINITY STUDENT

IN October 1852, a few months after attaining his majority, Davidson became a student of Divinity in Edinburgh. Six years before, on June 4, 1846, Chalmers had laid the foundation-stone of the New College, on the beautiful and commanding site of the old Palace of the Guises, and after four years the completed edifice had been opened with fitting ceremony. The high towers thereof, though planned by Playfair, somewhat offended the fastidious taste of John Ruskin, but many generations of students, go where they may, find no bulwarks to mark or palaces to consider with the same feelings of affection and gratitude. The spirit of the College was once for all imparted to it by Chalmers on that June day. 'The youth who frequent our classes,' he said, 'will with all earnestness and emphasis be told; that the Christian minister is a man of no rank, because a man of all ranks ; and that although he should

have an education which might qualify him for holding converse with princes and peers, it is his peculiar glory to be a frequent visitant of the poor man's humble cottage, and to pray by the poor man's dying bed. Heaven grant that the platform of humble life may be raised immeasurably higher than at present, and through the whole extent of it,—that the mighty host who swarm upon its surface, brought under the elevating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, may rise to full equality with ourselves in all that is characteristic of humanity, and take their place along with us, side by side, on the footing of kindred and companionable men.' ¹

The New College always has an air of standing between things ancient and modern. Behind it is the old Royal Mile from Holyrood up to the Castle, Scotland's most romantic street, where her history was made by saints and sinners. In front is the new Royal Mile of Princes Street, peerless in Europe, beyond which the fascinated eye wanders over gleaming waters to a distant horizon of dark blue mountains. And in the things of the mind the College is equally central

¹ Hanna's *Memoirs*, iv. p. 425 f.

and sovereign, bound by a thousand memories to the old, opening its gates wide to the new, giving law and gospel to mould the character of a great nation.

This fair ideal of fidelity to the past and readiness for the future is what each new generation has to realise. Those teachers and students who strive most earnestly to attain it are the truest New College men and the best Free Churchmen. The power of the Church does not depend on things ancient alone or things modern alone, but on their combination. Like the action and reaction of forces, like the systole and diastole of the heart, like the synthesis and antithesis of thought, is the double movement, backward and forward, which conditions the life and health of the Church. How to interrelate the old and the new, history made and history in the making, is the ever-changing problem, and a thousand things indicate that it is the Divine will to make the problem hard. If ever the solution seems easy, one may be sure that this or that factor has been overlooked, and that the answer will not come out right. How can the perfect adjustment of ancient faith and modern science ever be other

than difficult? God is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, but He is for ever fulfilling Himself in new ways. Stand in the old paths, and co-operate with Him who is making all things new. Hold fast that which is good, and press onward towards perfection.

It was because Davidson was so loyal in mind and heart to the old, that he found it good to breathe the air of the College. I never heard of any moral upheaval or spiritual crisis in the story of his youth. I have suggested that his likeness to the prophet whom he regarded as the greatest of all the goodly fellowship began with his consecration from his mother's womb. I believe that he was one of those happy souls who cannot remember when they were converted, who have no recollection of any transition from the unconscious to the conscious doing of God's will. When that can be said of any youth, there is usually a mother in the case, as there certainly was in his :

Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
No angel, but a dearer being, all dipped
In angel instincts. . . . Happy he
With such a mother! Faith in womankind
Beats in his blood, and trust in all things high
Comes easy to him.

When, therefore, Davidson began to listen to Cunningham and Buchanan, Bannerman and Duncan, he found himself in cordial enough sympathy with their general teaching, and especially with their attitude towards the vital fact of the Person of Christ. He was a Christian in the full sense of the word. No one could be long in his presence without feeling and knowing that. I do not think he was ever in the least attracted by the mythical theories of Strauss, the typical Rationalist of the time. Of Unitarianism I remember his saying once, 'I have looked at that, but I never could make anything of it.' And if he bought and read Renan's books—as he did—that was because Renan was not only a great Semitic scholar, but an amusing writer with an incomparable French style. When I told him I was reading Renan's *History of Israel*, he only smiled and said: 'Ah! he's not to be taken seriously.'

And yet Davidson had scarcely settled down to work in the New College before he began to feel a strange, unaccountable uneasiness. And when he got into touch with the men around him, walking and talking with them on the way to and

from College, visiting them in their rooms and receiving them in his, he found that the same feeling had taken possession of many of the best students in all the different years. What was the reason of this general unrest, the reality of which could not be doubted? We find the explanation in a letter from a very active-minded octogenarian, who well remembers that time. James Duguid, Davidson's successor in the school at Ellon, entered the New College some years after him, but while the position of things was still little altered. 'In Davidson's days as well as in my days,' he says, 'the students were ahead of the professors, who were all old men. Cunningham was by far the most open-minded and influential of them all. When Davidson was himself a student, there were several of the best men who seceded from the Free Church. There was the same restlessness in my day—as was shown, for example, by the revolt of the seven Glasgow students against Gibson. They came over to Edinburgh for the last two years of their course. Even with us they were far from satisfied. Cunningham was quite aware of this, though he did not say much even privately. Everything

betokened the need of an advance. Davidson felt that. He was from the first truly evangelical.' The style of these last sentences is Johannine rather than Pauline. I take them to mean that Davidson felt the need of an advance, not though he was, but because he was, from the first truly evangelical.

That we may know what exactly was going on inside the walls of the College, let us make the acquaintance of two of Davidson's contemporaries. John Veitch and Alexander Nicholson had been among Sir William Hamilton's most brilliant students, and between the Saxon of the Scottish border and the Celt of misty Skye there grew up a beautiful friendship. They were both not only clear thinkers but men of fine reverence and poetic feeling. Neither of them, however, seemed to find in the New College what he expected, and the result was that they were both lost to the ministry of the Free Church, in which their rare gifts would have made them such a power. A couple of extracts from their correspondence, written at the time of their vain quest for the Holy Grail, will indicate better than anything else known to me what the College lacked

in those days. 'To think,' exclaims the indignant Celt, 'that because a man, fronted at once with the whole array of theological dogmas, takes upon him to examine and question them, he is therefore to be marked as an unwholesome, entangled sceptic, is everything that is servile and degrading.' To which Veitch answers : 'In point of fact, in performing this process you are merely discharging your duty. To seek to extinguish the spirit of enquiry is as hopeless as to essay to turn the sun from its course. Besides, where would be the Protestantism they profess, if such a thing were carried out ? Truly this is liberty from which I would fain be free and a Protestantism against which I protest.' ¹

Walter C. Smith, the poet-preacher, vividly recalled those times and knew the men intimately. Nicholson became his lifelong friend and a member of his Church ; and I cannot help thinking that the following is a portrait, as faithful as it is arresting :

Trained for a priest, for that is still the prize
And high ambition of the Scottish mother,
There was a kind of priestly purity
In all his thoughts, and a deep undertone

¹ *John Veitch : a Memoir*, by Mary R. L. Bryce, p. 97 f.

Ran through his gayest fancies, and his heart
Reached out with manifold sympathies, and laid
Fast hold of many outcast and alone
I' the world. But being challenged at the door
Of God's high temple to indue himself
With armour that he had not proved, to clothe
With articles of ready-made Belief
His Faith inquisitive, he rent the Creed
Trying to fit it on, and cast it from him.¹

It would be difficult to imagine anything more absurd than Professor Gibson's attempt to deliver men from doubt by the summary process of branding them as heretics and threatening them with law, instead of convincing them by the force of truth. Looking back upon that time, Mr. Duguid does not hesitate to say that 'the Free Church was on the edge of a precipice.' But when the case of the Glasgow heretics, who might just as well have been New College heretics, came before the General Assembly, the spirit of reason happily prevailed. Peter Bayne has told what happened. 'A sense of painfulness and spectrality,' he says, 'pervaded the atmosphere. Gloom sat upon all faces. . . . At this moment a young man, with light golden hair and a general aspect of calm brightness, appeared in the midst, and drew

¹ *Poetical Works*, p. 41.

upon himself all eyes. He spoke with remarkable clearness, but with a minimum of noise. As his words flowed on, it was felt that, as in a transformation scene, the whole situation was changed. The respected Dr. Gibson, and the sharply logical Dr. Begg, had been unable, he gently suggested, to sympathise with the eccentricities of growing minds.' The speaker was Robert Rainy, and as he presented this view of the matter, 'the darkness went. The light came. The gloom rose from every brow. The difficulty had vanished. . . . The students of Glasgow became, in due time, efficient ministers of the Free Church.'¹ Clearly Rainy was the man to keep the gates of the New College open to gifted youths of large and liberal mind.

But it is surely a singularly anomalous state of things when students become accomplished scholars and successful ministers of the Gospel rather by their own efforts than by the aid of their teachers. Of Davidson's own progress at the New College his friend Duguid says emphatically, 'I believe that he owed very little to the professors.' One may surmise that he regularly

¹ *The Free Church of Scotland*, 2nd ed., p. vii. f.

attended their lectures, perhaps faithfully taking notes, and he could scarcely fail to be impressed by Cunningham's massive power. But the fact remains that the most we can say of his curriculum at the Theological Hall is that during the whole of it he strenuously continued the self-education which he had begun at Ellon.

Happily, however, there was one scholar who in many ways strongly attracted and powerfully influenced him. Regarding that teacher Alexander Nicholson¹ wrote: 'Of all the professors in the New College, one only was highly interesting to me, the unique and wonderful Rabbi Duncan.' Davidson would have heartily echoed these words, and the Rabbi did more for him than for Nicholson or any other student, not as a teacher of Hebrew, for though he could 'talk his way to the Wall of China,' he was unfit to be an instructor in Hebrew or any other language; nor by his lectures on Old Testament theology, into which there entered scarcely a ray of historical or literary criticism; but by that spiritual genius which makes the *Colloquia Peripatetica* a living book to this day. Davidson as well as Knight enjoyed

¹ *Memoir* by W. C. Smith, p. 6.

many a memorable talk with the Coleridge of the Free Church, and it was doubtless a common admiration for the intellect and spirit of the great Calvinist that drew these younger men often together. No two Aberdonians were ever more unlike one another in their habits of mind than Duncan and Davidson, and the one was thirty-five years older than the other. But that only makes their strange fellowship all the more interesting, and it goes without saying that 'the two were throughout on the most friendly terms.'¹ Even on the linguistic side, Davidson could profit by the old teacher's knowledge as none of the other men did, for while he was perfectly familiar with the modicum of grammar and syntax that was taught in the classroom, he had only to get his master alone and state any difficulty, in order to obtain from him all the information that he wanted.

Neither unprofitably, then, nor unhappily did Davidson spend those four years. We get a glimpse of the student in his rooms from a letter by Alexander Yule, who was 'a very intimate and dear friend of Davidson's all his life,'¹ and who

¹ James Duguid.

writes thus : ‘ Davidson entered the New College in 1852. That was my first year, but as I had previously been in the Aberdeen Theological Hall, we were not in the same class. We lived, however, in the same lodgings in Castle Street, and came to know each other as only close neighbours can do. He was in those days a diligent worker, but not an overworker, and he was always cheery, kindly, and ready to argue with, or to help, the friends about him. Dr. Duncan, the Professor of Hebrew, was not much of a teacher. If Davidson learned to teach from any one, it was from Melvin, for he possessed Melvin’s two great characteristics—extreme accuracy, and the power of making his pupils think his own subject of vast importance. But Duncan was a man of great learning, strong orthodoxy, and deep piety, and for all these things Davidson highly esteemed him. It was not very much to hear the Rabbi lecture, but to hear him talk, when the listeners could ask him questions, as I remember hearing him in Davidson’s rooms, was a thing never to be forgotten.’

A letter of Davidson’s own, written in June 1854, after he had finished his second year at

the Hall, throws light upon his inner life and the feelings with which he looked forward to the work of a minister. One cannot but be struck by the curiously Montaignesque style, blended with something higher, which is very remarkable in a youth of twenty-three. He says : ‘ As for myself, I am only just plodding away in the midst of the most beggarly elements, making some exertion, but little progress ; receiving in general an answer to the petition, “ Give us each day our daily bread,” but not afflicted with any severer dispensation of Providence than the toothache and corns upon my toes, and it may be sometimes a twitch of conscience and a somewhat blank and dreary glance into the hidden vista of the future. I am not, however, without some rays of that “ hope which comes to all.” My principal fears are connected with my own unworthiness and inability properly to discharge the functions of the office to which I have destined myself. Preaching is active, and my previous life has been one of inaction. Leave me in my room with a book, and tell me to prepare it before a certain time, and make my appearance with pen and ink, and undergo a written examination upon it, and

I would find no difficulty in preparing to any reasonable man's satisfaction ; but to stand up and spout my own composition before a congregation of my betters exceeds at least the utmost stretch of the estimate which I have formed of my own fortitude. I have no doubt custom will bring sufficiency of coolness, but what is to become of me before I become accustomed ? As these things are still looming in the future, however, I shall let them alone, and perhaps after all the difficulty is more imaginary than real, and the principal fears I ought to entertain are lest I go to the pulpit with matter not worth hearing, and with too low, not too lofty, an opinion of the sacred and noble calling of a preacher.'

In Old Testament and other Semitic studies Davidson received effectual help elsewhere than in Edinburgh. His instinct for the right step in matters of education was, as we have seen, unerring. Taking counsel, I imagine, with no one, he went at the beginning of one of his summer vacations to Göttingen, where Ewald, the greatest Old Testament scholar of his time, was at the height of his power and fame. There he had

doubtless much the same experiences as many another student in that pre-war time which now seems so far off. That he kept his head, and was rather inclined to be critical, seems to be the purport of the following cryptic quotations. 'Göttingen,' says the poet Heine, whose recollections of the spot were not pleasant, 'is famous for its sausages and its university, belongs to the King of Hanover, and has four classes of inhabitants, differing but little from each other : viz. students, professors, Philistines, and cattle, the last being the most important.' 'It is curious,' says the same writer in another place, 'that the three greatest adversaries of Napoleon have all of them ended miserably—Castlereagh cut his own throat, Louis the Eighteenth rotted upon the throne, and Prof. Saalfeld is still professor at Göttingen.'

Yet there can be little doubt that Göttingen left an indelible stamp on Davidson's mind. Her most famous teacher, Ewald, is remembered with great honour to-day as the solitary German professor who dared, *more prophético*, to denounce the methods of barbarism which have now plunged Europe into war. For comparing

Bismarck with Frederick the Second 'in his unrighteous war with Austria and his ruination of religion and morality,' and with Napoleon the Second 'in his way of picking out the best time possible for robbery and plunder,' he was shut up in prison. He is chiefly known, however, as the great linguist, historian, and Old Testament theologian. And I have the idea that if there were any two men who influenced Davidson, they were Ewald abroad and Candlish at home. He used to speak of them as he did of no other men, and each of the three certainly had a strange *daimonic* element in his character. To take Ewald first. This is how he is described by Professor James Sully, who studied in Göttingen some years after Davidson, and whose words singularly recall the substance of some of Davidson's own talks. 'The white ascetic face, with its prominent cheek-bones and its bright spiritual eyes, framed in between two long wisps of white hair and an ample white neckcloth, would alone have riveted our attention. But the magical power lay in the utterance. The mere sounds were wonderful, as a rapid passage given in a sort of weak falsetto gave place to slow tones of an un-

usual depth of pitch and richness of timbre. The quick movements, too, which accompanied the declamation, such as little energetic tappings of the closed hand when a point had to be hammered in, or quick movements of the head and hands as the Hebrew text had to be brought near the speaker's eyes, added to the intensity of the expression. The Psalmist's own deep passionate-ness appeared to overflow into the lecturer, as his utterance now rose to the fierce explosive cries of invective, now sank to the tender notes of pleading which took on something of lyrical rhythm and melody. We seemed to be listening at one moment to a poetical recitation, at another to a dramatic personification, rather than to a scholar's exposition of a text. We soon discovered that this tempestuous oratory was more than an interpretation of the words of psalmist or prophet. A new fascination revealed itself in those fiery denunciations when we knew that they were directed to the heads of the living, that this spiritual-looking recluse was daring, from his professorial chair, to strike at his new earthly rulers—at the Prussian King and his Minister, Bismarck, whose growing potency he envisaged

as a "Frevel" (an outrage).'¹ Davidson was always himself, *nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri*, but the influence of mind upon mind is a very subtle thing, and, apart from the last sentence, there is not a little in this extract that somehow brings back many a memorable hour in the Old Testament class at the New College.

The other strain was Candlish. As a student, a tutor, and a professor, Davidson must have 'sat under' the minister of St. George's for nearly twenty years. His niece, who accompanied him to church every Sunday, writes very simply thus: 'He had a great admiration for Dr. Candlish, he listened with great attention, and attended with great regularity.' So did many another, but somehow one feels that the three 'greats' meant much in the spiritual life of such a worshipper. And the proof of it is that if we read one of Candlish's best sermons and one of Davidson's best lectures, we find the same *flair* in both. Friends like James Duguid also emphasise Davidson's 'extraordinary admiration' for his minister. 'I remember,' says this excel-

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, XIII. ii. p. 289.

lent correspondent, 'that once when I was staying with him, he took me to a meeting at which one minister after another prayed, and a good deal of it was rather thin and poor and flat, until Candlish rose and prayed, making every word tell like the stroke of a hammer. When we came away Davidson said, "Did you notice the *contrast* between Candlish and the others?" The question reflected the judgment not of an hour but of half a lifetime, and I cannot help thinking that the similar *differentia* which every student noted in Davidson's own prayers was an incommunicable secret shared by those two men alone.'

CHAPTER V

THE PROBATIONER

DAVIDSON finished his course at the New College in 1856, when he was twenty-five. He then applied for licence to preach the Gospel—the Scottish equivalent for Holy Orders. ‘I was present at the Edinburgh Presbytery,’ writes an aged minister,¹ ‘when he passed his trials for licence. He read a lecture on the New Vine, to which some one took exception; but Mr. MacLauchlan of the Gaelic Church took his part, and the discourse was sustained.’ The chivalrous old Highlander evidently thought that the young man had the root of the matter in him, and his confidence was not misplaced. I have received convincing evidence that nowhere in the kingdom is Davidson’s memory more revered than in the manses of the Scottish Highlands.

As a probationer Davidson enjoyed a two years’ experience which was no less valuable to him than his three years’ training as a schoolmaster, giving

¹ Rev. W. Affleck.

him a preparation for his future work which he could not have received in any other way. Indeed, he would probably have lost nothing, and gained a good deal, if his probation had been followed by a few years in the ministry. The view is steadily gaining ground that no man should ever be appointed to a theological chair who has not first been ordained to a pastoral charge. What the operating theatre is to the surgeon, what Nature is to the botanist, what the sea is to the swimmer, that evangelism is to the theologian. The churches of Holland and Germany have been all but ruined by the appointment to Divinity chairs of men who have been students and *privat-docents* but not evangelists. 'Religion and theology are thus utterly separated. That is one of the most serious indictments one could make against the theology of any country. The great danger in our own country is that there should be a divorce between theology and personal religion. We must keep the two together. We must realize that when dealing with theology we are dealing with what affects God and man.'¹

During his years of probation Davidson was

¹ Principal W. B. Selbie.

twice a Missioner and once an Assistant. I am not sure of the order. Dr. Walker of Carnwath, author of *Theology and Theologians of Scotland*, who would have been Professor of Church History in Glasgow if his health had not failed, had under his superintendence a mission at Carstairs, first at the Junction and afterwards in the village. It was largely maintained by the Monteith family, assisted by the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church. A missioner carried on the work, conducting the Sunday School, preaching in the hall on Sunday evenings, and so forth. Half a score of probationers followed each other in this position. In them and in their future career Dr. Walker took a deep interest. Davidson was one of them, and I regret that I have no details of the intercourse between the two scholars.¹

His second mission was at Craigmill, near Blairgowrie. Dr. Cameron says, 'He was there for a year at least, I am quite sure, and on leaving Craigmill his Bible Class presented him with a Bible which I have seen among his books.' Miss Margaret S. Saunders² writes: 'The work of

¹ See *James Walker of Carnwath*, p. xxxiii.

² Daughter of 'Christian Democrat' of the *People's Journal*, and sister of George Saunders of *The Times*.

Dr. A. B. Davidson at Craigmill as a preacher and missionary is now a mere memory. There are few on this roadside who even recall his name. The old joiner remembers him as a young preacher, in a black coat and white neckcloth, going in and out among the people, always kind, if a little shy and reserved, and always welcome in the houses of the mill-workers. Dr. Davidson seems to have been here about 1856. At that time the flax-mills on the river Ericht were very busy, and about four hundred workers were employed where now there are possibly not more than one hundred. The mill at Craigmill—now, alas, in ruins—was very busy in those days, and as it stood on the river near the entrance gate to Craighall, it was natural that the ladies of the Hall should take a kindly interest in the mill-workers. They were women of sterling character, full of good works—Miss Charlotte Rattray, who afterwards became the wife of the Rev. Robert Taylor, and Miss Elizabeth, who married the Rev. A. Burn-Murdoch. They had the welfare of the people much at heart, and it was through their never-tiring zeal that the school and cottages at Craigmill were built.

‘ There were no school boards in those days, and the education of the children was not attended to as it is to-day. The ladies of Craighall, not without some opposition, took their own savings and built the school, with rooms adjoining for a teacher and a missionary. The site is on the Craighall estate, close to the river Ericht, among beautiful spreading trees and near the old bridge of Craighall, over which is the main road to the Highlands. It must indeed have been an inspiration to a young student like Mr. Davidson to live among such beautiful surroundings, and to preach to the country people in the schoolroom beside the murmuring river, and among woods full of the sweet singing of birds. The relationship between the missionary at the school and the family at the House of Craigmill was of the friendliest nature, and one member of that family who was here in the old days has a touching story to tell of a sad journey he took with Mr. Davidson. The miller of the Steps of Cally, seven miles farther up the glen, had been coming home from the Blairgowrie market, when his horse took fright on the road near Craigmill, and ran off on a mad gallop towards the bridge. The miller

seems to have entirely lost control of the horse, and, turning the sharp corner of the bridge, the cart was overturned and the miller crushed to death under it. Mr. Davidson and the old man who tells the story were soon on the spot. They carried the body down to the house and laid it reverently in a sheet. Together they took the body in a cart, late in the evening, up through the woods of Craighall to the old mill at the Steps of Cally. The miller's wife was looking for her husband, with a young child in her arms, and Mr. Davidson's friend tells how kindly and gently the young student broke the news to the grief-stricken woman, and prayed earnestly for her and her little children that God, their Heavenly Father, would comfort them in their great sorrow. The old man says he still remembers the sad white face of the preacher and his gentle comforting words to the poor widow and her little children. "As we came home again," he says, "it was nearly morning, and daylight came shimmering through the trees and the birds began to sing, but Mr. Davidson sat very quiet and said very little, but seemed to be thinking a great deal."

' His life and work here among the people, his

kindly relations with the ladies at Craighall, and with his friends at the Mill House, must have made Craigmill a happy and helpful memory to the great scholar; and though few here now remember Dr. Davidson, any glimpse one does get of his life and work shows a character kind and gentle, from close fellowship with His Saviour Christ, and a memory still fragrant and sweet after many years.'

Of his assistantship in Aberdeen I have received rather fuller accounts. This brought him into happy relations with one of the most interesting men in the Granite City. Dr. Macgilvray, of Gilcomstone Free Church, 'was a Highlander, a tall and handsome man, with much stateliness of manner. He was an emphatic rhetorician, irascible in controversy, and highly orthodox, even according to the measure of those days. But he was a gentleman, kind and generous in heart, and a lover of young men. He knew how to put them at their ease and to get the best out of them. For his assistants—most of them, at any rate—he had an extravagant admiration, and delighted in their preaching. Between himself and Davidson a cordial and lifelong friendship grew up, and

when Dr. Macgilvray died, after storms not a few, Davidson paid a characteristic tribute to him in the *Free Church Monthly*.¹

Mrs. Macgilvray was a daughter of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, director of Kew Gardens and one of Darwin's friends. Writing from Eastbourne, her daughter, Miss Macgilvray, says: 'I was only a schoolgirl, towards the end of the fifties, when Mr. Davidson became my father's assistant. But I remember well what was said of him in the Church, although he was but a short time with us—I think not above six months altogether. He was of a very shy, retiring disposition, although he responded warmly to any overtures of friendship—especially feminine ones—which might be held out to him. He was often a welcome guest at our manse in Gilcomstone—as often, I should think, as his studious habits permitted him to mix in society. No doubt he saw that my father and mother admired him, and liked to see him in their home. I recollect one thing—because it proved prophetic. My grandmother, the late Lady Hooker, was staying at the manse during his term of assistantship, and he

¹ Sir W. R. Nicoll.

called one day and was introduced to her. When he left the house she remarked to my mother, "That is a remarkably clever young man ; he will make a name for himself some day." I have often heard my mother, in speaking of him to her friends in after years, repeat this impression he had made on a stranger lady. In Gilcomstone it was always said that my grandmother had "discovered" his particular talents. His reply to an acquaintance of his, who asked what he thought of my parents, was certainly characteristic. He said, "They are excellent people. I love the Doctor, and Mrs. Macgilvray is a lady of exquisite character, as good as she is fair." If Mr. Davidson never excelled as a preacher, it was not from want of knowing how to preach profitably, but I think from his habitual shyness. His manner and voice in the pulpit did not tell to his advantage, and yet my father used to say he was by far the ablest preacher he ever heard in the Gilcomstone pulpit. His learning alone would have made him that.'

Another good judge of character met him in those days for the first time. 'On one occasion,' writes Mr. Cormack, 'Davidson and I entered

a bookshop in Union Street, when the Rev. William Pirie Smith, the father of Robertson Smith, came in, and I introduced him to Davidson. Mr. Smith told me afterwards that he had never seen a face that gave such clear indication of great intellectual power.'

Of his life in Aberdeen during that half-year Mr. Cormack gives one more glimpse. 'Our friendship was renewed and became more intimate. A small coterie of old friends—Brebner,¹ Michie, and two or three more—came into close intercourse with him. We often met to exchange views and hold discussions. Being naturally shy and reserved, he was never a great talker, and in a large company was generally silent, but among his friends he could let himself go, and be the life and soul of the party—ready to debate, quick at repartee, displaying the extent of his knowledge and the vigour of his intellect. One-sided he could not be. He must look at a subject from all sides. This may account for his pleading sometimes on the pro and sometimes on the con side of a debatable question.'

¹ Rev. John Brebner, LL.D., who became Superintendent of Education in the Orange Free State. His Life has been written.

CHAPTER VI

THE TUTOR

IN the autumn of 1858 A. B. Davidson, Licentiate, went to preach as a candidate in the vacant church of Cruden, the next parish to his native Ellon, now famous for its golf links. It was, I believe, the only time he ever had to submit to the ordeal of being heard 'with a view.' On such an occasion he naturally did not shine in his own eyes, but the kindly folk of Cruden, some of whom knew the people up at Kirkhill very well, might have surprised him if the matter had ever come to a vote. When he got back to his rooms in Aberdeen, however, he found a letter awaiting him, addressed in the well-known handwriting of Dr. Duncan. On opening it he learned, to his astonishment and delight, that he was offered a Hebrew tutorship in the New College. The Senatus had at last awakened to the fact that a Hebrew Professor might be expected not only to prelect as the spirit moved him, but to teach the

elements of Hebrew. That was evidently beyond Dr. Duncan's power. The metaphysician and saint had not the gifts of a teacher. And, being the humblest of men, he was himself painfully conscious of his limitations. But he knew a scholar when he met one, and his spirit was never touched to finer issues than when he summoned to his aid the best Hebraist that Scotland has ever produced. Henceforth 'the Rabbi' could give his mind to higher things than grammar, and when he was rightly inspired his lectures must have been something unique in these islands. But there were days on which he appeared with a woe-begone look, fearing that he was a hypocrite, and scarcely daring to face the students. One morning he said to Robert the beadle, 'Oh, Robert, I am not worthy to lecture to my class. I doubt I'm not a Christian at all.' Robert replied, 'Weel, Doctor, ye ken that best yersel, but pit on your goon, the lads are waitin' ye.'

Having migrated to the city in which he was to have his home for more than forty years, Davidson began the work he loved. He was at the outset somewhat fettered, for it is well to note that 'after he was appointed assistant to Duncan,

Cunningham impressed upon him that he was *not* to lecture—he was simply to teach Hebrew to the first class. Cunningham emphatically laid this down.’¹ It may not be easy to explain the situation—to determine whether the special emphasis was due to a scrupulous regard for the older scholar’s prerogatives, or to an unexpressed dread of some new thing in the younger. There may have been more reasons than one for the interdict. But let us see the tutor at work. ‘On one occasion,’ writes Mr. Cormack,² ‘I had an opportunity of witnessing the marvellous dexterity with which he manipulated the Hebrew words on the blackboard while giving the necessary explanations to the students.’ And Dr. George Reith gives us the following vivid memories: ‘When I joined the New College in 1861 Dr. (then Mr.) Davidson was assistant to Dr. Duncan. I have very clear recollection of the deep impression made on the class by the scholarly methods and precision of our tutor; by the width of his knowledge, of which he never made an ostentatious display, but permitted an occasional flash

¹ James Duguid.

² He was at that time missionary in St. Paul’s Free Church, Edinburgh.

to light up the rather prosaic task of translating Hebrew and laboriously spelling out the grammar of Gesenius. It was fine to see him turn his head towards the window, which commanded an extensive view of Edinburgh chimney-pots, and with a sort of semi-consciousness follow out some train of thought—suggested by a word or phrase—along the lines of his secret stores of learning ; and then with a sort of apologetic air come back to the book before us, as if half ashamed of having even appeared to make a show of his knowledge. During the sessions we were under him he confined himself pretty closely to the elementary part of the work, as the venerable Rabbi used to enter the classroom whenever he felt so disposed and prelect in his wonderful and unforgettable way. But it was in the second year, if I remember rightly, that Davidson began to give us a taste of his critical and exegetical power. Even at this long remove I can recall the thrill of the mental upheaval in my conception of the Old Testament ; but while I say so, it would be unjust to my old teacher if I did not pay an equally emphatic tribute to the cautious and reverent wisdom with which he handled the inspired volume, and, like

the scribe instructed into the kingdom of heaven, brought out of his treasure things new and old.'

'Critical power,' 'mental upheaval,' 'things new and old'—what does all this mean? Clearly much more than a teaching of beggarly elements. Is it deliberate insubordination? Has the interdict (not for the first time in Scottish church history) been ignored? Has the young admiral quietly taken command, and looked at the signal with a blind eye? One prefers to think that after four years (for this was in 1862) Davidson had so completely won the confidence of his superiors, as well as of his students, that he was left with a free hand, and even encouraged to lengthen his cords and strengthen his stakes. It seems all the more likely, because that was the very year in which Candlish became Principal of the College. He appreciated Davidson from the first. 'Dr. Candlish,' says Mr. Benjamin Bell,¹ 'who held very sensible views on the consistency between inspiration and literary freedom, had a great regard for Davidson, and felt him a great comfort in the college.'

¹ Minister of Upton, son of Dr. Benjamin Bell, and brother of 'Sherlock Holmes.'

Mr. Alexander Davidson, London, nephew of the Professor, possesses a gold watch which was presented by the students of the New College to their Hebrew tutor on March 7, 1862, 'as a mark of gratitude and esteem.' 'It was his wish,' writes the present owner, 'that I should have that watch after his death, and the students who gave it to him may like to know that it is still going strong, keeping perfect Greenwich time, and is likely to be handed down to my successors in that condition.'

For the tutor those were happy years, full of work and free from anxiety. 'I was often in his rooms in my student days,' writes Mr. James Brebner, Dundee. 'I think I hear his laugh of keen appreciation after repeating a pithy verse of Burns, whom he greatly admired, or a plaintive stanza from Edgar Allan Poe. Beauty in nature, *e.g.* the drumming of the snipe, appealed strongly to him.'

Professor Blackie, ever friendly, was now in Edinburgh, and when Davidson came up from Aberdeen 'he was invited to join a class for reading Greek—it was Plato that was being read. The class consisted of Blackie, Donaldson, who

was then Rector of the High School, Dr. Lindsay Alexander, Professor Sellar, Lord Neaves, and some others. Davidson was not able to attend more than a few meetings, as he was fully occupied with his own duties.' ¹

What was still more important, he was now, with quiet concentration and firmness of purpose, giving his mind to his first large and honourably ambitious literary task. His study became a scholar's workshop. Friends who called found him surrounded by the tools of a scientific exegete. He had the faculty of taking infinite pains, and he got through a vast amount of deep and difficult research. But all that was only the underside of his work. When a great painter was asked what he mixed his colours with, he answered, 'With brains, sir.' There was no lack of essential brain-work in anything that Davidson ever did. But more than brains went to the making of his first book. It was written with his heart's blood.

'He came at that time very little into society,' writes Mr. Cormack, 'but was on friendly terms with several of the city ministers, especially with Dr. Rainy, with whom he and I dined together

¹ James Duguid.

one day. We had many pleasant walks amid the picturesque surroundings of Edinburgh. He had an open eye for the beauties of nature, and would descant on the wonderful adaptation and marks of design everywhere around us.'

Design everywhere—this serene faith is all the more remarkable because it is in so striking contrast with the doubts which form the crux of the Book of Job. There is adaptation and design in the loveliness of nature ; but is there adaptation in disease, design in suffering, divinity in death ? It was no 'lust of linguistic'—Dr. Duncan's phrase for his own besetting sin—that attracted Davidson to the Book of Job. It was the desire to get to the centre of things—the heart of humanity, the marrow of divinity. And when the first half of his labour was ended, and his *Commentary, Critical and Exegetical*, was published, this was—though very few at the time realised it—an event of first-rate importance in the theological world. For, as the latest edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*¹ says of the book, 'It is recognized as the first really scientific commentary on the Old Testament in the English language.'

¹ Vol. vii. p. 862.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROFESSOR

EARLY in 1863 it became known throughout the Free Church of Scotland that a colleague and successor to Dr. Duncan would be appointed at the coming General Assembly, and of forty-four Presbyteries which sent up nominations, thirty-four favoured Mr. A. B. Davidson; of eleven Synods, nine made him their choice. Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Murray Mitchell was also nominated by some Presbyteries and Synods. A strong testimonial written by Dr. Duncan, and a memorial signed by eighty-six New College students, helped to make the tutor's merits known. The parchment of the memorial remained in the possession of David Somerville, the first of the eighty-six signatories, whose son, the minister of Peterculter, has lent it to me. Of those who signed the document fifty-three years ago, twelve disciples are still living. The first in the First Year is James D. M'Culloch, who is now Principal of the

Free Church Hall, and the last, Alexander Whyte, who is Principal of the New College. The rest of the twelve are : in the First Year, Alexander M'Millan ; in the Second Year, Daniel M'Kerchar, George Reith, J. A. P. Johnman, James Kilgour, William Affleck ; in the Third Year, Alexander M. Craig, James H. Thompson, Gilbert Lawrie, and Archibald N. Macray. The last survivor of the Fourth Year, William Stevenson, who sent me a short contribution for this memoir, has since gone home.

Principal M'Culloch writes : ' I had the advantage of Professor Davidson's tuition only in what his predecessor was wont to call "linguistics." As a teacher he, in my opinion, excelled all I ever sat under in the faculty of making his subject intelligible, and he was most kind in his intercourse with the students.' What Mr. Stevenson writes of Davidson's teaching gifts is similar to Dr. Reith's tribute. He then continues : ' I had always held him in the highest regard—I may say veneration. When I had the pleasure of meeting him, therefore, it was in this attitude of spirit. To my surprise, however, and not less to my delight, it was not in this relation he met me. He

put himself on my level—never seemed to think it possible to do anything else—welcomed me as a friend and brother in the most simple, hearty, human way. The most conspicuous thing about him was his simplicity, his utter unpretentiousness, his—one might say—excessive modesty.’

Another of the twelve, the Rev. A. N. Macray, who was Cunningham Fellow in 1864, writes : ‘ It was while I was a student in the New College that A. B. Davidson was elected by the General Assembly. He had not long before published his *Commentary on Job*, in which heresy-hunting men were not slow to find such new and unsound views as to lead them to champion another and safer man. The coming election was of course the one question with all of us. Some of the Fourth Year men drew up a petition in favour of Davidson’s appointment, which most of the students signed. It was not couched in the most modest language, and I remember how Principal Candlish made merry over our oracular assurance that Davidson was master not only of Hebrew but of all the cognate Semitic languages ! It was while the issue was still uncertain, that one afternoon,

as I walked home with Davidson, he said to me as we parted, "Well, Macray, defeat is not extinction." The words passed deep into my mind, and have been a *vade mecum* in a long and very chequered career. I pass them on to those who come after me. They may serve to rally and reassure a true soul in some crisis of life and ministry. Davidson could not have been wiped out by any ecclesiastical blunder, but I do not like to think of the comparative extinction that might have befallen the Hebrew Chair, and the long impoverishment of the New College, if it had lost, as John Watson rightly says, "its most famous man and its singular glory."

When the Assembly met, Davidson alone was proposed. Dr. Candlish spoke of his teaching experience, his linguistic gifts, his literary distinction, the 'confidence and affection' of Dr. Duncan, 'the confidence and affection' of the students. The seconder, Mr. Nelson of Greenbank, read a letter from Franz Delitzsch of Erlangen, which was no doubt similar to the tribute paid by that scholar in the Introduction to his own *Job*: 'Umbreit is characterized by enthusiasm for the poetical grandeur of the

book, Ewald by vivid perception of the tragical, and Hirzel by sound tact and good arrangement—three qualifications which a young Scottish investigator, A. B. Davidson, strives, not unsuccessfully, to unite in his *Commentary*.' The appointment was unanimous.

At the beginning of the following session, on November 2, Professor Davidson was ordained to his high office. Dr. Garden Blaikie preached, and then addressed to him 'words of counsel and encouragement.' The address, which Dr. Davidson has preserved, is somewhat rhetorical, but the programme which it sets before the young professor could scarcely be improved. 'A Professor of Divinity has discharged but a fragment of his task when he has given a course of admirable lectures. Something far more is to be aimed at. There is no phrase which Dr. Chalmers was more in the habit of using than the *terminus ad quem*. He was for ever considering "how the theology of the Chair was to be transmuted into the theology of the pulpit." It is solemn, it is almost overpowering, to think of all the influence, for good or for evil, that goes out from a theological classroom. The influence *you* exert may

tell upon numberless persons in numberless ways ; it may tell upon the banks of Indian rivers and in the outskirts of Australian solitudes ; it may tell in the depths of Canadian forests or in the crowded cities of China and Japan—who knows where it may not tell ? . . . Your great work is the opening up exegetically of the Old Testament scriptures. How are the statements of the Bible to be reconciled with modern science, that we may not be thrown into a fever of alarm each time that science comes out with some new and startling discovery ? How are we to adjust the human and the divine elements in the inspired volume so as to separate that which is human and uncertain from that which is divine and immutable ? . . . To aid in raising exegesis to its own place of supremacy, to bring out the true purport and meaning of obscurer portions of the Old Testament, to remove the temptation to spiritualize and allegorize, and otherwise twist and torture the sacred Word, will be a service to the cause of truth. There may be more of God's mind to be yet brought out of the Scripture than many think. It is not progress in theology, but revolution in theology, that we have reason to deprecate. To

allow a reasonable latitude for progress and the modification of present views is the way to prevent revolution ; sternly to refuse such a latitude is the way to hasten it.' In conclusion, Dr. Blaikie holds up the example of Bengel, Tholuck, Duncan, and others. ' May it be given you to follow these men, and when your course is run, may those who come after you have equal cause to thank God for the lessons you have taught them, and the spirit which these lessons have breathed.'

In his own inaugural lecture Professor Davidson expressed his conviction that Biblical Theology is the salvation of the Church, both as an outlet for her activity and a fresh form for her consciousness. And while he pleads for scientific exegesis, he strenuously denies that mere science is enough. To interpret biblically is to interpret pneumatically, that is, by elevating ourselves into the region and consciousness of the inspiring Spirit.¹ With that he plunged into the work of the College, taking up the subject that was to be his special theme without a break for nearly forty years. ' During the session that followed his appoint-

¹ *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 1 ff.

ment,' says Dr. Reith, 'he delivered a weekly series of lectures on the Prophets and Prophecy, which some of us, though no longer members of his class, would not have missed for a good deal. These are embodied in his published works, and sufficiently explain the masterful grip which he was gaining over his students. The men emerging year by year from the College began to speak with a growing emphasis of the commanding influence of the Professor of Hebrew, to whom they attributed that rare faculty, possessed by one or two in a generation, of opening up a new world of thought, in things that seemed trite and commonplace, to young and enquiring minds.'

At the end of a strenuous session Professor Davidson started for the East, which drew his intellect and heart alike. His passport, which he preserved, bore the signature of Lord John Russell, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and permitted him to travel through Italy, Turkey, Greece, and on to Syria. He settled down for some months at Beyrut, where he daily enjoyed the vision of the snowy Lebanons, and whence he made journeys to the sacred sites. He diligently studied Arabic, both literary and colloquial. And

he made friends with the Americans who were just beginning their great educational work in Beyrut, especially with Cornelius Van Dyck, who was then engaged on his gigantic task of translating the Bible into Arabic,¹ and who afterwards gratefully acknowledged the assistance he received for a time from the young Scotsman.

Many people are disappointed with the East, probably because they lack the seeing eye. Davidson's whole training, as a child, a youth, and a man, had prepared him to drink in the spirit of the Holy Land. His delight in the mere pageant of oriental life was fresh as a child's. He read the *Arabian Nights* in the original. He reaped the harvest of the quiet eye, and his imagination became a gallery of scenes, pictures, and images which enriched him for life. At the same time he acquired a scholar's grasp of all the scientific problems connected with the Holy Land. Sir G. A. Smith says that having occasion to discuss with him the Book of Nehemiah on the topography of Jerusalem, he was astonished at his mastery of the intricate data. 'On all such subjects—historical, archæological, geographical—he

¹ It was published in 1865.

could lecture as fully as many specialists.'¹ It was with reluctance that he at length turned his face homewards, and he left among the natives of Beyrut a reputation which lasted long, as 'the Frank who knew Arabic but did not speak it.' Whenever in later days one got him to talk of his journey to the East, his face lit up with happy memories. As he grew older it was always his hope to return. He had the English king's longing for 'the holy fields' trodden by the 'blessed feet.' He desired to see the places where he had been so glad in his youth. And 'doubtless he might have had opportunity to return.' But the time comes when the human spirit turns rather to the City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

¹ *Union Magazine*, 1902, p. 203.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRITIC

IF it were true, as many people hold, that a theological teacher should never change his views, his life would be delightfully easy. One of Davidson's contemporaries in Edinburgh University, having made his class lectures perfect, got them handsomely bound, and 'it was curious to see the volume brought in and laid on the desk by a stately servitor, and then read on as it had been for many years before.'¹ Some other theological teacher is reported to have said, 'I can't understand why the men don't seem to appreciate my lectures; they are the same as I have been giving for twenty-five years.' Many of Professor Davidson's earliest lectures on Old Testament subjects were posthumously published in an expensive volume, without note or comment, thirty or forty years after they were written. I once asked Professor Harry Kennedy, of the New

¹ *Life of A. H. Charteris*, p. 35.

College, how he thought Davidson would have felt if he could have read that volume. 'He would have shivered,' was the answer.

Davidson was Socratic in many ways, particularly in holding that an unexamined life is not worth living. No text was oftener on his lips than 'I have seen an end of all perfection.' He was an embodiment of that divine discontent which is the condition of all progress, that *élan vital* which keeps a man for ever learning and makes him die 'not having attained.' In his striking face the most arresting features were his eyes, so wistful and kindly, but also so steady, penetrating, scrutinous. Every one could see that there was something very peculiar about them. He wore glasses and seemed short-sighted, but students soon learned not to count upon that. 'I do not think,' writes his niece, 'that his eyesight affected him much, as he could see so well the distant hills which he admired so much, with his glasses of course; but he always read the smallest print without glasses; he read at prayers without them, in his Hebrew Bible, but the English side; and he could thread a very small needle for me to the last day of his life.' Those eyes, now

on the distant hills, now on the eye of a needle, made him the foremost critic of his time.

First, of course, he scrutinised himself, and the view did not seem to give him much comfort. In a letter, dated June 5, 1865, when he was thirty-four, he unfolds his inner life to his college comrade, William Cormack, of Cape Colony, revealing a mind baffled by the riddles to which the spirit of a new age was demanding a solution from every thinking man. After telling his friend, among other things, that he has been abroad in Syria trying to perfect himself in Arabic, he says : ' History I have had none since you left. I have had some battles—fightings without and fears within. In the one I have gained a sort of victory, with the other I have acquired a sort of familiarity. This country is in what people who use large words call a "transition" state—as if the world, or nature, or man (or God ?) could be in any other. Either transition or stagnation and corruption. All life and the universe is in transit, like a dark spot across the luminous orb of the Almighty—only visible and defined against the great brightness behind it. But you know big thoughts are simmering in men's brains just now,

large, indefinite, hazy conceptions, tasking the greatest grasp to open and close upon, uneasiness and discontent with the gains of the Past, which will no longer fill but only irritates the soul into which its advocates thrust it,—and as the heedless eddies of the wind carry noxious thistledown but also seeds of the fairest trees and sow them indiscriminately on all soils, so at present every heart at all open to the influences of the times finds growing up in it a crop of miseries and hopes which its own hand never sowed but the spirit of the age dropped in, which bloweth where it listeth and you cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. But this breaking up of old forms of faith and the combinations of the old material into new shapes go on greatly in secret, unrecognised by the Churches. And so every one has an inner history which he will not yet venture to declare ; but I dare say not a few could a tale unfold full of “sorrows and aspirations” ; and the great difficulty of thinking men is I take it this : Is this spirit of the age really the tumultuous many-sided movement of God in history ? or is it the spirit of Antichrist, of whom we have heard that he should come ? The Christian Churches

here go in unanimously with the latter view ; many thoughtful Christian men who venture to speak, pronounce for the former. Happy seem to me those who take either side, and only miserable and paralytic are those who halt between the two. I own to one of the sick folk waiting at the pool in the vain hope that some angel will trouble the waters ; I dislike the old, I distrust the new.'

All this reads like a page or two from Amiel's *Journal Intime*. Has any more self-revealing utterance come down to us from that amazing decade in which the *Origin of Species* was still young, *Essays and Reviews* was spreading dismay in the whole bench of Bishops, and Huxley, like a picador, was goading Wilberforce in the arena of the British Association ? That was the time in which so many of the most thoughtful and earnest men felt that they were

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born.

In the second half of the letter Davidson proceeds to criticise for the benefit of his African friend the latest books he has been reading—Bannerman's *Inspiration*, Candlish's *Fatherhood of God*, and Mill's *Examination of Hamilton's Philosophy*.

The criticism is all very genial, but also very searching. Bannerman's book 'seems to have called forth no opposition and no assent. Nevertheless it deserves a reading, both for its falsities and its truths. I need not say that the learned doctor keeps up a holy war with the "proud human Reason," which is hell-born, and imposes eternal silence, except to concur, on its stubborn voice—though why its concurrence should be so eagerly sought when its lead is so vigorously denounced I cannot see. Dr. B.'s theory of Inspiration (all the time that he denies having any theory) is this. Inspiration is a twofold thing: first it consists of a step which more properly would be called Revelation—every part of Scripture as we now have it was infallibly revealed to the mind of the writer, *i.e.* every thought was impressed with infallible accuracy on the writer's mind; second, it consists of what is usually named Inspiration—these thoughts infallibly clearly communicated to the writer's mind were caused to be transcribed infallibly accurately by the writer's pen.' As regards Candlish's book, which at one time provoked so much criticism, the writer contents himself with giving a long and very

careful analysis of the line of thought. Later in the sixties he delivered a class lecture based on the book, but I have only a student's imperfect report of it. Evidently he discontinued it and probably destroyed his manuscript. Regarding the third book he says: 'In philosophy the stirring work at present is John Stuart Mill's *Examination of Sir William Hamilton*, over which, as if memorising another Flodden, English men and journals are sounding the loud trumpet and saying, Hamilton is fallen—is utterly cast down and demolished. To which Scotia has only given this modest response: Heely, heely! an English man canna' unerstan' 'im, lat alane pit 'im i' the wrang.' And then the writer winds up by begging his friend to come on a deputation to Edinburgh, and be his guest. 'I have taken a little house into which I hope to move this week.' That house, 11 Rillbank Terrace, became dear to many generations of students, for it was his home for thirty-five years.

Let the friend to whom Davidson thus gave his confidence help us towards an estimate of the Professor's critical attitude and ultimate achievement. He writes thus: 'It has, I think, been

hinted that Davidson entertained heterodox views. He certainly never held views like those which Dr. Duncan is said to have held in his youth. And an enquiring mind like his could never have rested content in Agnosticism. There were no doubt Biblical and doctrinal questions, as then stated, on which his mind was not yet made up. But this was his period of acquisition, when he was pondering the results of other minds, and diligently searching all sources of knowledge to find firm ground for his faith. And this can not be considered a restful phase of one's lifetime. In his sermon on Thomas, he speaks of "wrestlings for faith and light without receiving it." But I am sure he never fell a prey to a "sceptical mind, that heritage of woe." On several occasions, while he was tutor in the New College, I lived for two or three days in the same rooms with him. I remember still the wistful nature of his morning prayer—the faltering words of a thoughtful mind earnestly pleading for more light and knowledge, and awed by the perfections of the Almighty, regarding whom Zophar asks, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" . . . The im-

portant part of his letter is in the statement, "I dislike the old, I distrust the new." I think he must have had the feeling that it was his duty to bridge the gap between the two extremes. He had been in the professorial chair for some time, and face to face with his life's work. He had to equip young and eager minds and fit them for their sacred calling. No wonder that his mind was not quite at ease, as it was not yet made up with regard to certain critical questions both new and old. The age and the contents of the books of the Old Testament, especially those of the Prophets, were then being much discussed. Some writers were clinging to the old or traditional views. Davidson, I think, considered these views in the main effete or untenable. Other writers were introducing new theories vague and uncertain, which Davidson thought were going too far and too fast, and therefore untrustworthy. He needed something better than these conflicting elements to lay before the minds and hearts of his students. I think it must have been about this time that he set himself the task of his life—to bridge, with substantial material, the passage between the old and the new of

which he speaks. This required a thorough investigation of the Old Testament documents which the stream of time has brought down to us, and for this he was well qualified by his thorough knowledge of Hebrew and its cognates. The results of his investigation, as they grew and expanded, were laid before his students in his lectures from year to year during a period of about forty years, and are now embodied in his published works. He had to clear away what he thought was wrong or outworn in the old, and select what was sound and trustworthy in the new.

‘ When I was a boy I had to cross a stream of some size to get to school. There was no bridge, only stepping stones. These were sometimes slippery or unstable owing to the action of the stream. The result was that I and others sometimes fell in and only got to land with a good ducking. To remedy this the neighbours combined to erect a bridge. The bad stones were cast aside, the good were used to strengthen the foundations of the piers that had to bear the weight of the bridge. When this was completed the crossing was safe, easy, and pleasant. This may serve as an illustration of the work to which

A. B. Davidson devoted his life. I am not critical, and a busy life left me too little time to study properly the important questions involved. It is not for me to judge of the merits or demerits of the structure he has raised. From my knowledge of his character, of one thing I am sure, that he would not put hay or stubble into its foundations. I cherish, therefore, the hope that his work will stand the test of time and *abide*. I think his teaching has stamped an indelible impression on the Free Church.' And here the aged writer inserts a U., meaning United, above the line before Free, the old way of it evidently coming easier to the nonagenarian. Of himself he writes: 'I am now in my ninety-second year, and my days can be but few. I can only sit at a loophole of retreat, and look out at the sudden and confused transformation scenes of this unspeakable war.'

Principal Andrew Harper of Sydney compares Davidson's mind to that of an assayer, burning away the dross and always leaving the pure gold. 'In a time of theological transition,' he says, 'such as that in which Davidson lived, there are many useful types of mind at work. There are those whom the new spirit wholly masters. They

are the aggressive element in the new movement, and are so dominated by the new ideas that they push them to their limit, and straightway and quite ruthlessly remould all their former thoughts of God and man to bring them into immediate accord with the new truth as they see it. Others again, while equally enthusiastic in the advocacy of the new views, and pressing them to their ultimate limit, do not seem to feel much need to revise their general theological position except so far as that comes into direct collision with some fact which the new discoveries have in their view established. Then there is the most common class of all, those who, while open to conviction, stand always on the defensive ; admit only such changes as they cannot with a good conscience any longer oppose, and move towards the revision of their theology half unconsciously and with no greater speed than the flow of a glacier. In the critical movement, men of these and other types did yeoman's service, and by their joint action made the great transition which the thoughts of the Church had to pass through so comparatively innocuous to true religion as it has been.

‘ But the finest influence to that end was exerted by minds like Davidson's, which belong

to a higher class than any of these. He was early in the new movement, and for Scotland certainly, if not for Britain, helped to decide that it should not be a merely negative thing. He really *willed* the new, and never stood merely on the defensive, sewing new patches on the old garment. He knew what the end of such merely external procedure was bound to be. But he did not let the new overwhelm him so that he had to sacrifice to it all his former religious views. He assimilated what survived the crucial tests of his experience and his keen intelligence, as a man assimilates food and gains strength thereby. He moved quietly and resolutely forward in the light of his whole thought and experience, sacrificing no part of it to another. The aggressive men threw out no theory which he was not willing to consider; whatever they said he weighed in that keenly sagacious mind of his, one of the characteristics of which was expressed by an aphorism which was often on his lips when new and bold hypotheses came up for judgment, "It may be so; but then also it may not be so." He faced all the new theories of those days when they were "thick as leaves in Vallombrosa" with his unequalled

knowledge of the Old Testament, with his ripe scholarship, with his freedom from dogmatic prejudice, with his distrust of logic in theology, but also with his faith in spiritual intuition and his deep emotional response to the love of God which was the very foundation of his character. Before new views could be accepted by him, they had to pass the test which all these imposed, and many of the most popular and revolutionary simply withered in his hands. He laid them aside with a quiet scorn, which was all the more scathing that it was hardly conscious. But, as it seemed to me, he absorbed unfailingly even from them whatever grain of truth had given them vitality. The more flamboyant versions of Old Testament theology which appeared in such numbers both at home and abroad he regarded, I remember, with a puzzled astonishment, so completely did they seem to him to stand out of relation to the Old Testament facts on which they were supposed to be based. Consequently, though he recognised the greatness of scholars like Wellhausen, he was never affected by the Wellhausen or other orthodoxies which soon grew up in the critical schools. He could never have been regarded as

“sound” by any of them. But his mind was always moving forward on its own sane path ; and it is to me an unceasing regret that the editor of his manuscripts was unable to arrange them so that the growth of his convictions might have been followed. In *Prophecy* alone can this be traced, but even there so dimly that the distance between his first and his final thought is not made clear to every one. Owing to this, much injustice will inevitably be done to his memory. Illuminating as many parts of his *Old Testament Theology* are, the bad arrangement mingles early with late in inextricable confusion. This is nothing less than a calamity, for had the true order of his teaching been exhibited, both the body of truth to which he had wrought his way finally would have been visible, and the way in which he brought to bear upon every question that arose, not his intellect only but his whole nature and his whole experience, and gave his judgment in the light of all of them, would have formed a lesson in method which would have saved quicker and lighter minds from some “regrettable vivacities” and from other more pardonable mistakes.’

CHAPTER IX

THE GRAMMARIAN

It is impossible to know the heart of a people without learning their language and studying their literature, and Professor Davidson constantly sought to impress upon the minds of his students two facts : first, that Hebrew is the language and the Bible the literature of a people who had an actual place in human history, and, second, that a love of the language and literature and an understanding of the people go together. He became a master of many languages, ancient and modern, but Hebrew was always first in his affection. At the end of a fine lecture (never published) on 'What is Language?' inspired by Renan¹ and Max Müller,² and full of youthful enthusiasm, he says : 'Hebrew speech is perhaps the most interesting of all speech. As a mere tongue it is interesting. It lies deep down among the strata

¹ *General History of Semitic Languages*, 1854.

² *Science of Language*, 1861-63.

of speech, a somewhat imperfect and rudimentary formation. It has traces of the action of fire upon it. It is the language of passion coming up hot from the people's heart. It has none of the cold logic of the West, no syntax, no subordination of sentence ; it is passionate and direct. We see in Hebrew, better than anywhere else, the mechanism and manufacture of speech, the words coming out of the speech mould impressed with all the forms and hues of surrounding things.'

First year's men, just beginning to read from right to left, used to be rallied to their task in such words as these, which I quote from an admirable lecture of 1865 : ' Let me beseech you, gentlemen, not to be scared by the dry, bare objects which you will be called upon mainly this year to inspect and handle. The language of Scripture is the skeleton of Scripture—bare, bald, bleached, repulsive—but fundamental. No manifestation of life or activity but is made by means of it. All the throbbing pulses and ramified muscles, and the grace of motion, and beauty of form—all are woven round and raised upon this inner hidden skeleton. And the young anatomist does not grudge to take the shapeless bony hand in his own,

and to gaze into the eyeless socket, and ponder over the brainless skull, for long months, making the skeleton his great familiar. What anatomist ever addressed a skeleton in the language of Macbeth and came to anything ?

Avaunt ! and quit my sight ! let the earth hide thee !
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold ;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

And I am sure that I am only doing you justice in assuming that you will imitate the anatomist, and then, when the language is well your own, you will have a pleasure and sense of power in going forward to interpret the Scriptures which will ten-fold repay all your former trouble. And let me say it is a very high thing to be allowed to be in trust with the Gospel of God and to declare His will.'

And to the same class or another, when they were heaving a sigh of relief at the end of the session, he gives the following wise counsel :
' Now, gentlemen, I am not going to detain you above a few minutes. Very many of you have now a very good hold of the grammar. With that the drudgery of Hebrew study is at an end,

The next thing is to acquire a good vocabulary. The Hebrew language has not a large vocabulary, five or six thousand words perhaps in all. And the easiest way to acquire a vocabulary is to read, and when you read to mark the unknown words and endeavour to fix them in your mind. It is best to read some passages not too difficult, some historical prose and the Psalms. The latter are short and detached, and one is not wearied by the feeling of never coming to an end. Let me advise you to read a little every day—a Psalm read every day would see you at the end of the Psalter before next session. But read daily something. I need not remind you that you will by and by be expounding the Old Testament to Christian men who will depend on you rightly to divide the word of God to them. Men who have to fulfil such a duty study with devotion. But it is good for our own religious life to make some small part of Scripture a study each day, and if when doing this you could either before or after read it in the original, it would be found fruitful to your own mind.'

Hebrew students in those days certainly needed all the stimulus and encouragement which it was

possible to give them. It is difficult for us now to realise the condition of things sixty years ago. When Davidson began his tutorial work he was under no illusions. He knew that in the Free Church and all the other Scottish Churches Semitic studies were at the lowest ebb, and that he had by his own efforts to turn the tide. The good old 'Rabbi' was for effective education in Hebrew all but nil, and even as assistant to that great man, whom he so loved and honoured, Davidson did not hesitate to say in one of his lectures : ' If there be room for lamentation in any department there is most ample room in the department of Oriental Literature. There the ignorance is gross. There the work accomplished amounts to absolutely nothing. Looking over the list of names of illustrious Scotsmen, you will meet with men who have gained a fair reputation in Science and in Occidental learning, but no one has any pretensions to claim to be an Orientalist. England has had one or two great Orientalists, France many, Germany a crowd, Scotland none. Even Italy, in spite of popes and priests and despots, outstrips her here. It would perhaps be rash to assert that we are degenerating in this

respect, but it is no rashness to say that until the last two or three years we have made no progress since the Reformation. We all remember the story of the minister in those days, who being challenged by the nobles to produce his commission to preach, unslung his Hebrew Bible from his belt, and threw it down before them, telling them that his commission lay there—they might read it if they chose. How many ministers in Scotland could boast of such a familiarity with the Hebrew Bible as this man ? ’

And so, like another youth born in a ‘ little wee thacket hoosie,’ he resolved to do something ‘ for puir auld Scotland’s sake.’ He could not ‘ sing a sang,’ but ‘ some usefu’ plan or book ’ was not beyond his power. He resolved that if Scottish youths came up to the New College to prepare themselves for the holy ministry, and did not learn the sacred language of the Old Testament, it should be their own fault. He would furnish them with all appliances and means to boot. Hebrew grammar, Hebrew syntax, and even Hebrew accents should all be made as clear and plain to the average intelligence as he, with such gifts as he possessed, could make them. It was charac-

teristic of him that he attacked the most difficult subject first, like Byron 'breaking his mind' on Armenian. There were probably not more than a score of people in Scotland who cared to read his book on *Hebrew Accentuation* in 1861, the year in which it was published. In his Preface he almost apologises for publishing it at all. It is really the business not of the tutor, but of the Hebrew professor, to produce such learned works, and to Dr. Duncan, who has urged him to undertake the task, and to whom he is indebted for much both directly and indirectly, he refers in these terms: 'He is in no way responsible for anything in the tract, whether statement or theory; much less for any of the blunders. I am persuaded that had he written it there would have been no blunders in it. It is to the sad loss of learning, both in his own and other countries, that he cannot be induced to put his own hand to something permanent.'

As one reads this paper-bound brochure, in which the functions of *Athnach* and *Silluq* and the other accents are discussed, one inevitably thinks of Browning's *Grammarian*. And if Davidson had never done anything but the work which the

present chapter records, he might of course have served as the poet's model. But while his little parergon on Accents was being written, his *magnum opus* on Job was already on the stocks. He would have utterly despised himself if he had only done grammatical work. The first books of Professor Driver—his *Hebrew Tenses* and *Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*—were purely grammatical and textual, and Davidson greatly admired them as such, but he impatiently waited for other things. I remember his once remarking in his study, 'Driver is as dry as parchment.' But when the Oxford Professor added to philology the deeper things of theology, Davidson rejoiced, and the perfect accord between the Scottish and the English scholar, with their warm appreciation of each other's work, was one of the chief joys of their life. After any meeting with Driver, Davidson was always happy. *Par nobile fratrum!*

With his *Introductory Hebrew Grammar* he took the utmost possible pains, and did not publish it until he had tested it by daily use for a good many sessions. In the Preface to the first edition he says: 'The following pages contain, in a form

somewhat enlarged and with some trifling alterations, the notes on Hebrew Grammar which for a number of years I have dictated to my class. Such notes usually exist in a condition more or less of flux, and alter their form as views change or further information is gained.' He acknowledges his debt to the Grammar of Gesenius, which 'has done much worthy service in its time, although it is now so covered with pages of various hues and manufacture, that the original texture perhaps scarcely appears anywhere.' And then he of course praises Ewald, who, 'as any one capable of judging will admit, stands at an immeasurable distance' before all other Hebrew grammarians.

After the proof-sheets of the Grammar had been read by Professor Robertson Smith, who also made 'many pertinent and valuable suggestions,' the book was published in 1874. Meticulously accurate, the author went, it is said, round the bookshops of Edinburgh to correct a small error which had crept into the first edition. A new edition appeared every second year or so, until the eighteenth was reached. In 1914 Professor M'Fadyen brought out an edition so much revised that 'with the exception of the vocabulary

and the exercises for translation little remains of the original Grammar but the order of the sections.' While one may be disposed to think that more changes have been made than were really necessary, students will be heartily grateful to the editor for making not a few rough places plain, and especially for giving greater prominence to essential matters which were hidden away in small type. Those who were familiar with the old book will miss a good many of Davidson's characteristic touches. Perhaps justice could scarcely be done to such a sentence as the following without his own intonation : ' In Hebrew the long vowel is a long vowel, and the short vowel, short, and the double letter is a double letter ' ; or to one like this without his smile (some will add his blush) : ' Names of utensils or instruments used by man are *feminine*, probably with reference to the position of woman as the serviceable inferior sex.' At any rate, these and many other Davidsoniana have disappeared.

Some readers will doubtless feel that all such revised books raise a difficult question, on which it so happens that Davidson himself had somewhat decided opinions, as we may have already gathered from what he said about Gesenius. In

a review of the third edition of Hupfeld's *Psalms*, worked over by Nowack, he says: 'It is almost completely recast—another illustration of the German habit of presenting what is virtually another book under the name of a former one. The practice raises a question which looks like a moral one. Under the hand of Weiss and his coadjutors, for example, Meyer's Commentaries are entirely transformed, and yet they are put out under Meyer's name. In the present form Hupfeld's work is lightened of much of its old cargo; the book is more serviceable and easily read—but is it Hupfeld's?'¹ In the same way we have to ask the question regarding this Grammar—is it Davidson's? Dr. M'Fadyen practically says it is not. Like Professor Selbie² and others, I think that the statement regarding the extent of the changes is somewhat exaggerated, else it would be a question whether the old name should be retained. And those who remember the way in which Davidson used to speak of fame as a *nominis umbra* know how little store he would have set by the guarding of his reputation as a grammarian. If some scholar were to produce entirely new aids to the study of Hebrew literature far surpassing

¹ *Theological Review*, ii. p. 362.

² *Expository Times*.

the old, one may be sure that the pioneer would say in spirit, like Aprile in 'Paracelsus' :

. . . Lo, I rejoice
In thy success as thou ! Let our God's praise
Go bravely through the world at last ! What care
Through me or thee ?

Of the admirable *Hebrew Syntax*, the sequel to the Grammar, it is not needful to speak here. It reveals incidentally, and without any ostentation, a knowledge of the comparative syntax of Syriac and Aramaic, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Assyrian. The book is necessarily full of what Bacon calls *lumen siccum*, but if ever an opportunity occurs some little bit of pathos or humour is sure to enliven the page. In order to illustrate such a Hebrew idiom as is found in the words 'Rebecca came out with her pitcher on her shoulder' (lit. *and* her pitcher), the writer calls attention to a corresponding usage in another language :

How can ye chant, ye little birds,
An' I sae weary, fu' of care !

And again :

Played me sic a trick,
An' me the El'r's dochter !

It was natural enough that when this Hebrew scholar's career was ended, John Watson and

others should be reminded of *The Grammarian's Funeral*. Yet, beyond the high devotion to life's task common to both, there is little in the man who 'settled Hoti's business,' and determined 'not to live but know,' to suggest the master who not only wrote the *Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, but displayed, as Professor Sanday aptly said, 'a singular power of getting at the heart of a religious conception.' This man was very far from crying 'Hence with life's pale lure! Leave time to dogs and apes!' Not from being 'hydroptic with a sacred thirst' for philology did he die ere he knew the great thing he pursued. One striking verse does, indeed, indicate wherein the one scholar's incomplete life resembled the other's :

Was it not great? Did he not throw on God
(He loves the burden)
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?

But for grammatical knowledge and critical skill Davidson cared only as passports to the highest things. One scarcely ever thought of him as learned in the special sense of the word—as erudite. Gilbert Murray has said¹ that 'a

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, April 1915, p. 334.

scholar is one who feels certain beauties and delicacies, and not merely one who knows many recondite facts.' True scholarship 'is an art rather than a science, though, of course, like other arts it has its scientific basis. It is even expected to form an integral part of character ; it helps to make "a scholar and a gentleman."' If that is true of classical learning, how much more true it is of Biblical scholarship, the final goal of which is not so much a mind enlightened as a heart purified, a life redeemed, a spirit drawn into abiding fellowship with God.

It is therefore easy to believe that Davidson's knowledge of the New Testament was scarcely less complete than his mastery of the Old, and that he sometimes, especially in later life, wistfully expressed the desire to pass, as a teacher, from Hebrew to Greek, from the partial to the perfect Revelation. In the Old Testament 'the temple of truth is not yet reared. Yet everywhere workmen are employed preparing for it, and all around are the exquisite products of their labour . . . till the Master-builder comes in whose mind the full idea of the temple bodies itself forth.'

CHAPTER X

THE TEACHER

DAVIDSON often read his Heine, perhaps because, being of a humble spirit, he liked to be chastened. Heine is the best tonic for the academic mind. His speciality is that he cures the malady of the specialist. He restores the ill-balanced judgment to a sense of proportion. His criticism of the philologist is final—he does not know the language of the stars. ‘They speak a wondrous language, so beautiful and grand, which none of the philologists can ever understand.’ The philologist is therefore of the earth, earthy. *Multæ terricolis linguæ, cælestibus una.* The one language of Heaven—ah! if it were possible for mortals to learn that! Could they but hear and understand the voices which are for ever vibrating like aerial magnetic waves through the universe, transmitting glad tidings from the heart of the Eternal to the frail children of a day, the difference would be infinite.

‘And the Word of the Lord came!’ That is surely the most arresting statement in human literature; and there is one way only in which the so-called Word of the Lord can establish its claim to be believed. It must be so true as to be self-evidencing. It must find us in the deepest part of our being. It must commend itself to the pure in heart. Now it is the abiding conviction of every Christian that there have been ‘teachers sent from God,’ and every day in which one was in Professor Davidson’s presence one felt that their messages thrilled him in every fibre of his being. After one of his lectures on those ‘bearers of the ideas of the kingdom of God,’ it was an ordinary thing to hear some student remark, ‘How like the prophets Davidson is himself!’ At times, moreover, when his voice became more penetrating and his manner more intense, one noticed that he had glided from the expression ‘Old Testament prophet’ into ‘Old Testament saint.’ And on such a day Robert Barbour, the bosom friend of Henry Drummond, said with quiet emphasis: ‘*He* is an Old Testament saint.’ That was doubtless the finest and most illuminating thing ever said about him.

Having such a teacher, we might have been under the temptation to follow him only too implicitly, to treat him as an oracle, to bring to his classroom a blind faith. We might conceivably have accepted on trust whatever he chose to call truth, bidding our souls take their ease. But these were the last things which he either desired or tolerated. He was not there to dictate to our minds, but to 'help men' to work out their own salvation with freedom of thought and will. His *disciplina* was neither oracular nor scholastic; it might be called Socratic or Cartesian; but, above all, it was Prophetic and Christian. It encouraged men to ask questions and even to 'prize the doubt low kinds exist without.' While its aim, from the very first, was seen to be positive and constructive, it insisted upon facing every difficulty. It not only permitted but compelled us to prove all things and try every spirit. It examined our intellectual beliefs one after the other, making every test an education in critical principles and historical exegesis. Problems which had hitherto awakened but a tepid interest suddenly became burning questions, to which we had to find a personal answer. Our vague ideas

of the Old Testament text and canon, of history and tradition, of miracles and morality, of Moses and the prophets, of inspiration and revelation, of Messianic ideals and the hope of immortality, had all to be subjected to a criticism which was now like a searching wind and now like a refining fire, until at length faith emerged from her ordeal strengthened by toil, purified by sacrifice, perfected through suffering. And if in the end we heeded her challenging 'Vestigia nulla retrorsum,' we were also cheered by her 'Alliditur sed non frangitur,' and inspired by her 'Nec tamen consumebatur.'

The effect of Davidson's Old Testament lectures, especially of his profound psychological studies of Prophets and Kings—Priests had little or no attraction for him—upon the hearer's mind is not easily described. He made the Second Year at the New College, by common consent, the *annus mirabilis* of the curriculum. His lectures were delivered twice a week—on Tuesday and Thursday—the other days being given to translation and exegesis of prescribed passages. His class met at noon, and was the last for the day, all the students dining together at one o'clock. On

the great lecture days, when the theme might be Saul or Elijah, Amos or Hosea or Jeremiah, the First or Second Isaiah, many of us came down from the top-storey classroom to the Common Hall moved with feelings of pity and awe, thrilled with aspirations of faith and hope, such as never held us even in witnessing the grandest dramas of heroic human passion in conflict with fate. And not a few of us, I am sure, were secretly relieved when the merry table-talk was ended, and we could get away to be alone and think. On those days I always found it good to have a walk round Arthur's Seat, and if a high wind was roaring in Samson's Ribs and the Salisbury Crag, so much the better. It harmonised with the tempest of the mind.

Many second year's students sent home letters similar to one received in the end of the eighties by the sister of George H. C. Macgregor, who 'remained all his days Professor Davidson's pupil.' 'Dr. Davidson has, as I have so often said, been making the Old Testament a new book to me. It is becoming to me so much more Divine, my belief in its Inspiration is tenfold strengthened, and that by the very man whom a

large company of our worthy people wanted to oust from his Chair as being one of the "higher critics," for the dire offence of seeking to find the truth in regard to the people of God and His revelation to them. On Thursday we had a magnificent lecture from him on Elijah. It was simply splendid. It was almost impossible to take notes. We just sat and listened entranced. His style is so exquisite, just prose poetry, and his thought is so deep and so instructive.'

Of course there were many lectures in which the interest was not so poignantly dramatic and personal ; memorable hours in which we were initiated into the Old Testament ideas of life and death, sin and righteousness, the prophetic spirit, the Hebrew wisdom, the genius of poetry, and so forth. And to those confronted for the first time with the problems of Old Testament criticism, all this was educative in the highest degree. 'We scarcely realized that traditional notions were being questioned ; rather we became conscious of a new perspective, outlined with caution and reverence, which in its main features appeared self-evident. We felt the guidance of a mind, inherently distrustful of mere

novelties, but sensitive in an amazing degree to the movement of God in history. There were many details of the critical discussion to which Dr. Davidson never referred. But in an almost furtive manner he would suggest certain broad fundamental ideas, which fermented in our minds all the more pervasively because he refrained from promulgating them as dogmas. He assumed and emphasized what was vital in contemporary criticism, not endeavouring so much to demonstrate its value as rather to indicate its fitness for elucidating the entire scheme of the history or literature of Israel.' ¹

'He has told us,' writes Dr. Skinner, 'that he considered his work as a Professor to be essentially a form of preaching; that is, of course, preaching as he himself understood it. His method appeared to be first to lay bare his mind, with all its native sensibilities and acquired affinities, to the impression of the idea or scene or character that was his theme; and then to reproduce the message which it conveyed to his own heart. . . . And that, too, was doubtless the chief source of his power as a preacher and a teacher; he made

¹ Professor Harry A. A. Kennedy.

himself a transparent medium, through which the light of the divine revelation was flashed on the hearts and consciences of men. It was not so much his voice that spoke, as the spirit of the Old Testament that found an organ in him ; it was the voice of the living God, whose shining track down the ages of history it was his lifelong work to explore.' ¹

Our Lord Himself regarded His teaching as a form of preaching, and His preaching as a form of teaching. When He speaks in the synagogue or the temple, on the Mount or by the seaside, it is impossible to tell whether He is teaching or preaching, and the Gospels use the one word as often as the other. Nay more, His ordinary conversation—His familiar colloquies with His disciples, His table-talk among strangers, and even His intercourse with solitary men and women—is a mode of teaching which searches the heart like the highest kind of preaching. In all audiences He was ever Himself—the Divine Prophet, the Incarnate Word. And every Christian teacher is happy whenever and wherever he lights upon the teachable spirit. I shall conclude this chapter

¹ *Expository Times*, xiii. p. 248 f.

with two illustrations of Professor Davidson's power of quietly and almost unconsciously influencing young minds in private life. He could be silent enough when he felt that he had no call to speak, but it was never really difficult to awaken his teaching instinct, the exercise of which was indeed his highest happiness. If he was one of the least didactic of men in the modern English sense, he was one of the most didactic in the ancient Greek sense¹—apt and ready to teach wheresoever he found the hearing ear and the understanding heart.

The best disciples are always the young. Who does not feel the fascination of St. Luke's picture of the boy Jesus among the doctors, both hearing and asking questions? And the following letter contains the memories of an Edinburgh lady whose whole conception of the Old Testament revelation was changed in her girlhood by the teaching, which was really just the familiar talk, of Professor Davidson. The writer is a niece of Professor Blackie, herself now a teacher in the Ladies' Missionary College in Edinburgh, an admirable Italian scholar and interpreter of Dante.

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 24.

‘The first time we met Professor Davidson must have been in 1867, I think. It was at Braemar, where at that time he went every summer. I remember my father coming in one evening from church saying, “A remarkable young man has preached this evening, I must ask Cobban about him.” Mr. Cobban, the genial loving pastor of the whole countryside, was the Free Kirk minister there, and a dear friend of each one of us. An introduction was quickly supplied, and the delicate, sensitive young Professor became a daily visitor, walking and talking and tea-drinking with us, but chiefly intimate with my father, who was very dear to such because of his warm sympathy with all younger minds, and his understanding joy in helpful heresies, and his saintly personality, which was of the self-forgetting and winsome order.

‘My personal friendship with the shy scholar began two years later, when I was eleven years of age. Strange though it may seem, my childish mind had for years been wrestling unhappily with Old Testament problems. I was taught Sunday by Sunday by an “orthodox” mother, steadily

working through the Old Testament narratives with what at that time was the correct instruction. My childish mind revolted, and I came near to saying this God is not my God. I never dreamed of telling the trouble to my father, and no *questions* were possible to a reserved child. Then came the wonder. I heard that the gentle, timid, to my notion middle-aged visitor was an Old Testament scholar, and that he had strange views about the Book of Job, views evidently interesting to my father and even attractive to my strictly orthodox mother.

‘How the next step was taken I can’t remember, but my next memory is of long walks along the road, gravely discussing *the* problems, and waking up to a glorious vision of a God who was gradually discovered by a slow, stupid, yet seeking people, the vision of great minds living close to the truth of things, and saying wonderful things—“just like the New Testament.”

‘What is now the commonest of lovely commonplaces was a great wonderful revelation to ignorant questioners in 1869 ; but what is characteristic and interesting is that learned man gravely and as man to man walking side by side

with the questioning child with never a frightening smile. The fragment on Job was promptly lent, not to the grown-up folk, but to the child, and by the child devoured with great delight. Many a talk we had about the afflicted poet and his tiresome friends, and I fancy the Professor got more amusement out of me than I suspected at the time. His own extreme sensitiveness kept him tender to the thin-skinned pupil, and never once was I conscious of being laughed at. . . . He had the most delicate and poetic mind I ever met, and yet with a reverent boldness in thought. There was always something fine and rare about him to me, but perhaps I was not much of a judge. I think he must have got more pain out of life than most people, and yet, who can say, perhaps more of the exquisite aroma than others.'

The following contribution not only shows how deeply and permanently he influenced another young scholar by his personal talk, but reveals the hidden source of the spiritual truths which formed the vital element of his faith. 'On one occasion when I was a student,' writes Dr. Harper of Sydney, 'Professor Davidson invited me to

accompany him and Dr. Macgregor, then recently appointed Professor of Systematic Theology, in the ascent of Ben Ledi. As became a student in such company, I said little during the long summer's day, but kept my ears open to the brilliant talk which rarely flagged. The day was lovely, and, as always on such occasions, Dr. Davidson was at his best. The melancholy that marked him on ordinary days fell away as we stepped among the heather, and he became bright and cheerful with that grave gaiety which always charmed while he was in that mood. Dr. Macgregor, too, was at his best, full of quaint quips and cranks. I cannot recall the details of the talk which flowed on from hour to hour with mingled seriousness and humour and occasional clashes of conflict. But I remember that it always tended to some discussion of the deeper things, and sometimes touched the "thoughts that wander through eternity." But they were always dealt with in a strangely contrasted fashion. Dr. Macgregor, although he was in most respects a typical Celt, was a man of most unusual ability in a logical way. So far as logic can carry a man in Theology he could go, and he

went with speed and power. Davidson, on the contrary, though an Aberdonian, was imaginative, elusive, and poetical, and refused to be held by logical fetters when these seemed to bind him to conclusions which contradicted his spiritual intuitions. From various causes I was then inclined to be impressed by the rigid chains of reason which the systematic theologian forged with such deft logical skill ; but since that day I have never been able to yield comfortably to my natural tendency. For it was my continual delight to see how, when his interlocutor had thought to hold Davidson by some web of irrefragable reasoning and was ready to triumph, he suddenly found that his prisoner had escaped him. On the wings of some poetic fancy, or some flash of spiritual insight, or some imperial generalization founded upon the nature of God or man, he was gone, and in escaping he flashed back upon his opponent in playful sarcasm a vision of truth which could not be contained within the boundaries he had fixed. It seemed to me then and always that Davidson trusted to his imaginative insight into the strength and weakness of the human spirit, and to his fundamental belief in the

love of God, for guidance in his theological thinking, more than to anything that could be done for him by the purely intellectual action of the mind. He had lived with the Prophets and Psalmists too long to have the logician's suspicion of the imagination as a guide to truth.'

CHAPTER XI

THE MASTER

IN his *Rugby Chapel* Matthew Arnold does honour to his father, the greatest of English schoolmasters, as one of the 'helpers and friends of mankind.' When A. B. Davidson received his appointment at the New College, 'he considered that he had found his life-work, and laid himself out to do it so as to "help men,"' a phrase which he appears to have employed frequently to describe his purpose both in lecturing and in preaching.¹ The true teacher believes that the most real kindness to his students is to spare them no requirement of their manhood. The work of the Hebrew classes in the New College tested the intellectual and moral calibre of every fresh company of men who came up from the Universities to the School of the Prophets. In the first year there was the irksome business of studying yet another ancient language, this time a non-Aryan

¹ Alexander Yule.

one. And when that half of the heavy task was done, there was in the second year the more exhilarating but no less exacting duty of mastering the ideas and ideals of the Old Testament. That meant that each Senior Class was taken, like a company of Argonauts, on a perilous voyage of discovery in almost unknown seas. But there was the zest of adventure, the eagerness of quest, and ere long the joys and spoils of conquest. And under such a leader there was, when one thinks of it, never any real danger of shipwreck, and least of all was there the remotest risk of mutiny. One scarcely regarded Davidson as a disciplinarian at all, but if ever one did give the matter a moment's reflection, it was easy to see that his conduct of his classes was perfect. He taught with authority. His simple words, 'It is meant that the work should be done, Mr. A.,' not only brought a blush to Mr. A.'s cheeks, but gathered the scattered wits of every slacker all the way down the roll to Mr. Z. And he was able to say towards the end of his life that in all his years at the New College, only once—it was very early—did a little misunderstanding and perhaps a trace of bitterness ever arise.

If we wish to get at the real secret of his power as a teacher, it is not far to seek. There was no text in the New Testament which he expounded more beautifully than one in the story of the Young Ruler : ' And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.' And no verb other than the strongest suffices to describe his attitude of mind and heart towards every ingenuous young candidate for the holy ministry who came to search the Scriptures under his tuition. And men instinctively felt that the severe demands he made upon them were the measure of his love. Now and again the burdens he imposed might seem to be too heavy. And he used to say that the most pathetic words in the Old Testament were, ' Even the youths shall faint and be weary.' But if the youths recovered themselves—falling to rise, baffled to fight better—a word of recognition from the master was a memory to last for a lifetime. A brilliant young Hellenist who entered the New College without being quite sure that he had heard the clear call to leave all and follow Christ, decided to go to Oxford and, in the meantime at least, continue his classical studies. But he had not been there many weeks before he became

finally convinced that he could never find satisfaction in a life devoted to secular pursuits. Returning to Edinburgh, he went as by instinct to Professor Davidson, the man who really counted—who in a sense was the New College. When he entered the Hebrew anteroom, Davidson met him with an eager, wistful, searching look, laid his hand upon his arm, and said, ‘ You ’ve come back ! ’ It was a sacred moment ; and many other men have similar memories of the master’s words, with an equal gratitude for the love which inspired them. That Hellenist is now one of the foremost New Testament scholars in Great Britain.

But, having said so much, one hastens to add that Davidson’s love for his students was far removed from affection of the sentimental order. You took no liberties with it. You soon discovered that it was served and protected by the comic spirit and all her train—wit, humour, and, in case of need, deadly irony. Some of the stories told of the master, and some of the sayings ascribed to him, are perhaps mythical. I believe that those given here are authentic.

To begin with a few linguistic stories. Mr.

M., a good fellow but not very highly gifted, was under examination one day in the Junior Class. After giving a fairly good translation, he proceeded to construe, and came to a certain noun. The Hebrew noun has three declensions, and the student was asked to which declension this particular word belonged. 'The first.' 'No, Mr. M.; try again.' 'The second.' He was still wrong, and the Professor continued blandly, 'Now, Mr. M., seeing it is not the first, and seeing it is not the second, and seeing there are but *three* (this in a crescendo), generalise a little!'

A junior student, who is now a very learned doctor, was asked, 'What becomes of that tone-long vowel, Mr. S.?' 'It drifts away into a *sheva*.' 'Take care, Mr. S., that *you* don't drift away into a *sheva*.'

Another student was asked, 'What termination has the *lamedh* *he* verb, Mr. N.?' He blurted out, 'It has no termination, sir.' 'Impossible! Mr. N.'

A student read a verse of one of the Hebrew Psalms, and then proceeded to give the English of the next verse without fault. The Professor

calmly remarked, 'There is Hebrew for that, but we have not yet come to that.'

One day, when Isaiah viii. was being read, a student was called up who evidently knew the Authorised Version better than the Hebrew, and it became clear as he struggled with the text that he was not sure which word belonged to which. Presently he came out with the expression 'wizards that peep.' Whereupon the Professor said, 'No, not peep yet, Mr. F., peep by and by.' And when he had got the poor fellow through it one way or another, he said, 'What a pity the prophet did not write in English, Mr. F. !'

Near the end of an hour with Isaiah, one of the best senior students had translated a large slice. There were still some minutes to spare, and Davidson never liked to waste time. So he said, 'Mr. S. !' Mr. S. has now a world-wide fame among Hebraists, but on that particular day he did not feel that he could go further. 'Mr. E. !' Mr. E. worked eight hours a day at Hebrew, but he too said, 'No, I cannot go further.' Then the Professor's face flushed a little, and casting his eye down the roll he said, 'Mr. T. !' There was a roar of laughter, for Mr. T., as every one

knew, had scarcely mastered the Hebrew vowels.

A student who was in the habit of saying 'Not prepared,' once tried to soften the censure by saying 'Not prepared to-day.' 'To-day! Mr. R., then be prepared to-morrow, Mr. R.' Next day the work was half over, and it seemed that the Professor had forgotten. By and by he suddenly put down a man who was reading, and said, 'Mr. R.!' in a tone that reminded the whole class of the previous day's proceedings. Mr. R. got up and proceeded to stammer through the Hebrew and give the Authorised Version. Davidson asked the root of a certain verb in the sentence Mr. R. made a bad guess, and the Professor exclaimed, 'No, Mr. R., no such root as that, man! You are six thousand years too late with that suggestion. If you had offered it six thousand years ago, it might have been accepted.'

One winter Professor Paterson, of the United Presbyterian Hall, was ordered by his doctor to rest, and obtained permission to send his students to Davidson's class. Principal Cairns came to introduce them, and thanked the Professor for so graciously consenting to receive them. For some

days Professor Davidson, not having received Dr. Paterson's roll-book, called up only Free Church students to read, and the U.P. men, thinking that they were to have an easy time of it, yielded to temptation. At last Dr. Davidson brought in Dr. Paterson's roll-book, and immediately called the first name therein. 'Unprepared, sir,' said the owner of the name. The Professor made no comment, but passed to the second name. 'Unprepared, sir.' So from name to name went the Professor's call, and from each student came the unvarying answer, 'Unprepared, sir.' Dr. Davidson closed the roll-book, and there was a little painful silence. Then he said, 'I was always under the impression, gentlemen, that U.P. stood for United Presbyterian. I now see that it stands for Unprepared.'¹

A certain student, who was a prime favourite both with the teacher and with his companions, was a youth of a very gallant disposition. He had a fine elocutionary style, but was not profound in his knowledge of Hebrew. One day he was called up to translate from English into

¹ I am warned that if I tell this story it may dissolve the Union! But on the Union question, as far back as 1870, 'Davidson voted right.'—*Life of Rainy*, i. p. 181.

Hebrew. He rose and read the first sentence in a full rotund voice, 'I will pursue after her.' In the dead pause that followed before the reluctant Hebrew words came, Dr. Davidson looked up with a twinkle in his eye, and said, 'Well, Mr. L., go on!' The story of course requires atmosphere, but at the moment it was irresistible.

A student rather painfully afflicted with shyness was asked to read the closing verses of the fourth chapter of Genesis, on the Song of the Sword. When he had finished, and was going to sit down, a quizzical glance from the Professor arrested him, and he waited for the following résumé: 'Adah, an ornament, a very suitable name, Mr. P. Naamah, pleasant, that's a very suitable name, too. Zillah, a shade; sit down under her shadow with great delight, Mr. P. Thank you, sit down.'

A family of seven M'Leods came up one after the other from the Manse of Croy to enter the University and then the New College. Mr. D. G. M'Leod of Boddam, the middle one of the seven, writes: 'On one occasion my brother James was called up by Dr. Davidson to translate. It chanced to be Genesis xliii. 7, where the ques-

tions asked by Joseph of his brethren are repeated to Jacob, 'Is your father yet alive? Have ye yet another brother?' It so happened that our father was still alive, and that there *was* another brother, the youngest (John), who was at home with his father. The Professor and most of his class knew this, and enjoyed a hearty laugh over it.'

One day 2 Sam. ii. was being read, and the verse was reached in which the words occur, 'Let the young men now arise and play before us.' On that day Mr. G. had brought a penny pipe with him into the class and let off a stray note somehow. Dr. Davidson called him up to read, and as usual Mr. G. was unprepared. 'Not prepared, Mr. G.? Don't you think you could arise and play before us?'

Davidson loved Highlanders, and put them at their ease. A red-haired and red-bearded Celt came up to the College somewhat uncouth, but soon improved socially and intellectually to a remarkable degree. He was at first very timid in the Hebrew class, and was one day stammering in his attempt to read the lesson, when the Professor encouraged him in this fashion, 'Come

away, Mr. M., you are accustomed to pronounce far harder words than these.' The effect of the little allusion to the other language—the Celtic mother-tongue—was remarkable. From that day forth Mr. M. never again showed any signs of timidity. The geniality had won his heart.

One day a portentously grave student stopped short in his translation and said, 'This word is not in my dictionary, Dr. Davidson.' With a smile the Professor answered, '*Not* in your dictionary; it must be a very curious dictionary yours, Mr. R. *Wayyishaq*, the 3rd singular imperfect *Qal* of *nashaq*, to kiss; it must be a *very curious* dictionary, a *very curious* dictionary, *indeed*, Mr. R.'

A student who gave a cold as a reason for absence, and who had frequently given the same reason, was asked, 'Is your cold *chronic*, Mr. S. ?'

Another man, who was frequently absent from the class, was called up one day, and failed to answer a question put to him. The Professor remarked to him, 'We had that yesterday, Mr. D., but probably you were not here yesterday.'

One winter there was fine skating on Duddingston Loch, and some of the men could not resist

the temptation to go there when they ought to have been at their classes. Davidson, whom nothing escaped, referred to them as the 'backsliders.'

The most trivial thing served to bring out the Professor's keenness and quickness of observation. One of the students accidentally discovered that, for some reason or other, when one of the planks of the floor over which he sat was moved with his foot it slightly shook the door on its hinges. None of the class seemed to notice the movement of the door, or, if they did, thought anything about it. But the Professor looked cautiously off his book with a puzzled, inquiring glance, evidently conscious that the noise, however slight, proceeded from no ostensible cause ; and a trial on two or three occasions showed that it never failed to attract his attention.

If there was any whispering or inattention, the master's way of commanding silence and securing attention was to give a tap with his pencil. Then he would be silent, blush, and look at the window. Then three or four taps, and then more silence . . . and it seemed as if the Day of Judgment was coming.

But of course he varied his procedure. ' If a

working student by some accident broke the stillness while the Professor was lecturing, he would give him a quick, reproachful glance, which brought the man into the Retiring-Room afterwards to explain the conduct of his ink-bottle with abject apologies ; but if it were only some idler at the back who had been amusing himself by making a pyramid of hats, then the sudden flush of anger would fade from the Professor's brow, as he recognized the cause, and he would say, as it were to himself, "It's only Mr. Tomkins." Only Mr. Tomkins ! There was no man living in Edinburgh who could administer such punishment.' ¹

Yet he was not so strict a disciplinarian that he could not at times relax. 'When I was a trembling first year's man,' writes a London minister,² 'only three months in the New College, it came about that my brother was to be ordained at Wick. He and I were great chums, and he was very anxious that I should be present at the ordination. The length of a Northern ordination, and the deliberation of the Highland Railway, made it probable that the whole

¹ Dr. John Watson. ² Rev. Ivor J. Robertson, Regent Square.

thing would require a week. So I, a trembling suppliant, went into Davidson's anteroom, seeing I considered that his was the only class that mattered, and asked a week's leave of absence to go to Wick to my brother's ordination. He let me get through the whole request without a single word of encouragement, and at the end said that he was very sorry, but Providence and the powers she had conferred upon Professors had neglected to include the power of giving a week's absence to a student in order that he might attend a brother's ordination. He regretted this personally, and sympathized with me, but the facts were as he had said. Whereupon, very sick at heart, I picked up my hat disgustedly, and made tracks for the door, just to hear him say, as I retired, over his shoulder, "But if I were you, I would just go without leave of absence at all."'

At the dinner-table an American student put to him the question, 'Dr. Davidson, what would you say is the trend of theological thought at present?' The Doctor, after some hesitation, answered, 'Do you not think, Mr. X., you might make your question just a little more general?'

Davidson had never much difficulty in measur-

ing his men. An old student, who had to demit his charge under the Inefficiency Act, came to him and said, 'It will encourage you to know that I owe all my knowledge of the Old Testament to you.' 'Oh, it isn't worth mentioning.' Another time the same gentleman said to him, 'I wish to bring before you an intellectual difficulty, Dr. Davidson.' The difficulty having been stated, the Professor said, 'I don't know that I would call that an *intellectual* difficulty.'

A young Divinity student, 'doubting at every pore,' and probably rather proud of the achievement, called upon the Professor. He unfolded the long tale of his difficulties. The Professor must have detected something unreal or affected about his visitor, for he sat in silence. The young doubter came at last to the end of his recital and rose to go. Davidson had no objection, and saw him to the door. There the young man looked up at the sky, and said, 'It's a lovely evening.' 'Oh,' said Davidson incisively, with some trace of astonishment, 'are you sure of *that* ?'

Every student had to write an 'Exercise and

Addition,' that is, to comment on a selected passage of Scripture from a critical, historical, and literary point of view, and then to discourse on the moral and spiritual teaching which it contained. There was no task in all the four years' curriculum over which the men took such pains. And Davidson made it worth their while. He read every exercise carefully, and wrote out his criticism—often long enough to fill a page of sermon paper—which was partly a summing-up and partly a verdict. And after the student had read part of the discourse before the class, the eagerly awaited judgment—occupying, it might be, five minutes—was quietly read. There are men all over the world who remember to this day exactly what Davidson said of their 'Exercise and Addition,' and how he said it. Many of these criticisms still exist, and they make very interesting reading. It was the master's rule to appreciate before he hinted any disagreement or disapproval. He always knew his men, took everything into account, and adjudicated accordingly. Very often the praise was most cordial. A few sentences may be extracted. 'There is not only clearness of perception, but capacity for

setting the individual point under a general conception, which shows great general ability on Mr. Skinner's part.' 'Mr. Croskery's discourse is scholarly, judicial, and without exaggeration, taking up and weighing fairly all the points which enter into the difficult question with which it deals.' 'The characteristic of Mr. Gordon's exegetical treatment of the passage is the intellectual firmness with which he seizes on the line of thought in the verses, and the elasticity with which he expresses it.' 'Mr. Mackintosh's introduction is in every way admirable—clear and exact in thought, and expressed with great succinctness and aptness of language.' 'Mr. Rae's is a most excellent discourse, full and well-balanced in thought, exhaustive in treatment, with intelligence and just appreciation of the modes of thought prevalent among the people of Israel, and sympathy with the beauty of the ideas and the splendour of the literature.' And so on.

The highest praise a discourse could receive was that it was 'a contribution to the literature of the subject.' That was what was said of W. G. Elmslie's exercise, and in the eighties there was a class which could boast of no fewer than six

discourses which were pronounced worthy of publication. As a matter of fact one of them—Mr. W. B. Hutton's exposition of Job xix. 23-27—was published in the *Expositor*,¹ with the editorial note, 'I am authorised to say that this paper has the approval and general concurrence of Professor A. B. Davidson.' After all the exercises of a class had been dealt with, something like this might be said: 'The discourses of the men of this year have been exceedingly good. Many of them show a tendency to generalise on the history of Israel, and certainly nothing helps so much to true success as a knowledge of the history.'

On certain subjects—for example, Job, Messianic prophecy, and the Servant of the Lord—it was inevitable that students should read up and reproduce what had been said by the master himself. And he would sometimes remark in his criticism of a discourse that he was gratified to find that the writer's views to a large extent coincided with his own!

An Irish student of nearly forty years ago, who had to expound the 19th chapter of Job, recalls how the Professor observed that he had 'read

¹ Third Series, vol. viii. p. 127 f.

round the subject,' with a slight emphasis on the 'round,' and says that the keen-edged criticism has ever since made him strive to get at the centre or probe to the bottom of any and every subject with which he has to deal.

The master's adverse criticisms have not been preserved, but they live in the memories of those who heard them. The judgment passed upon a certain discourse was : ' There's a great deal in this exercise about trees and grass and water, but very little Hebrew.' Of another paper the Professor said : ' Mr. X. seems to believe a little too much that brevity is the soul of wisdom. The introduction is meagre—meagre in the extreme ; the paraphrase is perfunctory ; and as for the addition, it is jejune.' Mr. X. went out with his head in the air, remarking as he went, ' What do I care about his Hebrew ? It's not Hebrew I am going to preach.' To which a fellow-student replied, ' If Davidson had said that to me, I would have sunk through the floor.'

A student who read part of his discourse used, evidently with great satisfaction to himself, the phrase 'humanly speaking,' which ranks with 'vouchsafe' as a clerical favourite. In his criti-

cism the Professor said, 'For my part, I always find it necessary to speak humanly.'

It is one thing to peruse a discourse and another to hear it read by its author, and for this reason the Professor was occasionally led to alter his verdict. This occurred in the case of no less a man than Samuel Rutherford Crockett. His composition was embellished with more poetic similes and flowers of speech than were usual in an Exercise and Addition. When Davidson called him up, the big, blond, dreamy-eyed man of Galloway towered like Saul beside the Professor's chair. He read a considerable part of his discourse with such verve and go that he brought forth applause, and Davidson was seen to brighten up. 'It had been my intention,' he said, 'to criticise this discourse as somewhat tall,' and he glanced at the spot where the giant had stood, 'but on hearing the discourse I find that it suits its author, and I must modify the criticism which I had prepared.' Mr. Crockett's evident sincerity had won him.

Insincerity was what he disliked above everything else. A man who had written an exercise was rather disappointed that he had not been called to read it. Being seated near the Professor

at the dinner table, he seized the opportunity of asking what he thought of the paper. 'Well, since you ask me, you want to know. I thought it was poor, but '—a pause in which several pairs of ears waited—'pretentious.'

The sin which was surest to be punished was anything approaching flippancy. An elderly student, whose theme was Jacob's contest with the Angel, had so little sense and taste as to represent the mysterious conflict as a wrestling match. The Angel was not accustomed to be 'thrown,' and so forth. In criticising, Davidson said this was a type of sensational preaching that should be condemned. If it went on, the result would be that all self-respecting people would forsake the Church, and ministers would bewail the godlessness of the masses, little thinking that they had themselves to blame.

Another man was discoursing on St. Peter's denial, and elaborated the reasons for the disciple's lapsing. He had been neglecting his private prayers, and in various other ways falling off, with the result that when the temptation came he denied his Lord. In his verdict Davidson objected to any man taking upon him to criticise

the apostles and others who were not their inferiors in Christian faith. 'Mr. N. *assumes* that Peter neglected his devotions, he *assumes*,' etc.

Reverence was the first quality which he required in the interpreter of Scripture. A student who was discussing with him one of the most crucial points in criticism, chanced to remark that the subject needed reverent handling. That was a remark after the master's own heart. With a glance of approval and a little lowering of his voice, he said, 'Ah, yes ! you must *always* treat it reverently.'¹

No man could look more shrewdly below the accidents and accessories of University distinction, or knew better how little an inflated reputation might mean in after life. 'Ah !' he would say, 'we see many such cases ; first they go up like a rocket, and then they come down.' It is the years after, far more than the years before, graduation and ordination that really make the scholar—*teste Davidson cum Sibylla*.

If a student was ill, the master's sympathy was unfailing. George A. Johnston, a St. Andrews

¹ Mr. Roger Hume, Otago, New Zealand.

double first-class Honours man, had a hectic flush on his cheek, and Professor (afterwards Sir) Alexander Simpson came from his consulting room one morning with a dimness in his eye. The disease developed rapidly, and Davidson often visited the student at his lodgings in Salisbury Street. The two scholars dugged together into the mines of Scripture, turning up precious nuggets. Especially they delighted in the words of Habakkuk, who wrote, Davidson said, the most beautiful Hebrew in the Old Testament. The prophet's words 'The just shall live by his faith,' were a pillow for the sick man to lay his head upon. And when the brilliant young scholar had spoken with his last breath some words from the newly published Revised Version—'To be with Christ is very far better'—the students of the College, with 'Smeaton the oldest in years, and Davidson the deepest in love, next the coffin,' bore him to his resting-place in the Grange.

When John G. Georgeson, one of Sellar's medallists, was taken in the spring of 1876, Rainy and Davidson went together to the stricken home. Rainy spoke the words of comfort to the parents, and then Davidson turned to a younger brother

and said, 'He was a very fine scholar, and his death is a great loss to the Church.' Simple words, but, spoken on that day by the hero of the departed brother, they stirred the young heart as scarcely any other words ever uttered, like a high summons to take the place of him who was gone.

Uno avulso, non deficit alter.

Now and then Davidson referred in his class to the departure of former students. On the Monday morning on which the tidings reached the New College that Professor W. G. Elmslie had fallen in his prime (November 16, 1889), Davidson entered his classroom with his face looking somewhat keener than usual. When he had prayed in his subdued tones, he read from a sheet of paper lying before him a brief tribute to his great pupil. It was just a few words of appreciation, with a suspicion of a break in his voice as he said, 'His was a bright mind, and'—with a glance round the classroom—'it's not so many years since he sat upon these benches.' After a pause he turned the page and said, 'The subject of to-day's lecture, gentlemen.' I remember having to be in his study that evening, and as he stood before the fire, I am sure that his eyes scarcely

saw the cigarette he was making when he said, 'There's nobody like him left—not one—not one.'

He always liked to keep in touch with his old students, and well they knew it. Among his papers I find a fading Egyptian post-card, written in a familiar hand and running thus: 'In the name of Allah [this much is in Arabic], Top of the great Pyramid, April 10 [1891]. Your pupils past and present send an affectionate salaam from the midst of the tents of Shem.—George A. Smith, W. H. Brown Douglas, Graham H. Balfour.'

When the master was sixty-six his admirers got Sir George Reid, President of the Royal Scottish Academy, to paint his portrait. Unfortunately it did not turn out one of the painter's successes. He could never catch the elusive scholar's *soul* by merely getting him to pose in a study arm-chair. All that he could expect to get in that way was a faintly ironical smile at his own intrusion. He ought to have seen his subject at the end of a class lecture or at a Communion Table address. Then the portrait might have shown a face illuminated both by the light of genius and the beauty of holiness, whereas it gives us only the

presentment of a somewhat prosaic man of business, 'a little country lawyer in his office,' as Dr. Stalker said. It did no sort of justice to 'the keenest intellectual face some of us have ever seen.'¹ One refers to it at all only because the gift of the portrait to the Senatus was the occasion of one of Davidson's most self-revealing speeches. In making the presentation Dr. (now Sir) G. A. Smith said it was to Professor Davidson more than to any other individual that we owed the revival of Semitic studies which has distinguished our generation, and which has been so fruitful in results, not only in the department of the Old Testament, but in the whole temper and tendency of theology in our day. And he referred to the fact that nearly all the Presbyterian Halls of the country had in their Hebrew Chairs men trained at the New College. In thanking the subscribers, Dr. Davidson said: It had always been a surprise to him how the students had shown him so much consideration—a consideration which he received when he first came to the College, and which had followed him ever since. He had always been conscious how imperfectly he had carried on the work of the Hebrew

¹ Dr. John Watson.

classes, and always expected that sooner or later he would be found out. At the end of every session he said to himself that he would do better next year. The subject was, of course, so wide that it was impossible to do it justice ; and he always felt in particular that the critical side of the Old Testament was very imperfectly handled by him ; but that was because his own mind had greater interest in the contents of the Books than in merely critical questions. While it was gratifying to him to know that many eminent scholars had passed through his classes, it was a greater pleasure to think that ministers up and down the country had benefited by his teaching. He deprecated what seemed to him the undue kindliness of his friends. Their warm feeling had suffused his figure that day with a glow that must soon in due course pass, and by and by the portrait they were adding to the walls—which he glanced around—would become almost nameless and forgotten, a mere *nominis umbra*. ‘Nevertheless,’ he said, ‘in these short years I may, perhaps, have been able to guide some whose feet were stumbling on the dark mountains. And it is enough.’

CHAPTER XII

THE PREACHER

‘HE is, if ever man was, a preacher *malgré lui*. Providence and himself conspired against it, and both have failed.’ So Taylor Innes wrote of his friend Professor Davidson in the eighties. If the true sign of a vocation is the impossibility of getting away from it, Davidson’s call to preach was indubitable. But surely in his case, and wherever there is a genuine call, Providence is on the other side of the conspiracy. As a preacher Davidson was akin to Jeremiah, who had a fire shut up in his bones, and to St. Paul, who preached because necessity was laid upon him. He could not live in daily fellowship with the Prophets and the God of the Prophets, and himself be silent.

When he was a young Professor, he had no objection to preaching in prominent Edinburgh pulpits. ‘I was an elder in the High Church,’ writes Mr. Alexander Davidson of Ruthwell, ‘and heard him preach from Dr. Arnot’s pulpit

in black gloves.' The black gloves are like something seen in a dream, incredible in the light of day. But it appears that they were a Presbyterian fashion of fifty years ago. Dr. Candlish, for example, habitually wore them in St. George's, and Dr. Donald Fraser in Marylebone. Professor James Candlish, out of respect for his father's memory, wore one black glove whenever he preached. The High Church elder adds that Dr. Davidson never came in Dr. Walter Smith's time. It must therefore have been in another church than his own that the poet-preacher heard Davidson's great sermon on Elijah, and was so thrilled by the interpretation of the 'still small voice' at Horeb, that he went home with an imagination on fire and wrote his own striking poem, 'It is the great Elijah.'¹

After middle life Davidson rarely preached except in small and out-of-the-way churches. 'He would never preach for me,' writes Dr. Whyte, 'often as I besought him to do so, but would steal away to the most obscure pulpit as often as he was invited.' It must not be forgotten that there were physical reasons in

¹ W. C. Smith, *Poetical Works*, p. 241.

Davidson's case for avoiding the strain and excitement of preaching often to great congregations. 'He had good health as a rule,' writes his niece, 'but he always thought his heart was irregular. He consulted Dr. Benjamin Bell, who I think put his mind at rest, but his heart was easily excited. He had a very trying illness in 1876, in which he suffered intense pain. I nursed him, and he was attended by his great friend Dr. T. G. Balfour.' Davidson must often have envied the splendid physical stamina of Dr. Whyte, his second minister in St. George's, whom he 'sat under' for over twenty years. Dr. Whyte often tells young ministers that he has never known what it is to be 'Mondayish,' which is doubtless what enables him to preach to delighted audiences in his eightieth year. Davidson was cast in another mould. He was a frail youngest child, nurtured by a Spartan mother and braced by the keen air of Buchan into some measure of strength, and his health was improved, probably his life prolonged, by golf. But he could never take liberties with himself. No one could preach as he did without expending much nervous as well as spiritual energy, and the

reaction was apt to be great. He would spend the Sunday evening reading poetry—Schiller was a favourite—pass a restless night, and next day be seen putting his hand to his heart.¹ To a gushing lady who hastened to thank him for a sermon which had sent her into raptures, and who exclaimed to him, ‘Oh, what a happiness it must be to you to be able to preach like that!’ he answered grimly and truly, ‘It hurts my back!’ After hearing one of his sermons, Dr. Taylor Innes sat down and wrote him a letter of thanks, offering him at the same time some friendly suggestions. Davidson received the letter next morning, and sent the following reply, which bears no date, only the heading ‘Monday.’ Perhaps it will indicate to lay readers, better than any halting definition, the meaning of that strange word ‘Mondayish.’

‘MY DEAR INNES,—It was very good of you to write me as you have done. I will endeavour to profit by your criticisms, but criticism very much resembles the Law, it commands but it confers no power to fulfil its commands. If along with your recommendations you could infuse into me the

¹ ‘We Davidsons all suffer from intermittent action of the heart,’ says his nephew Alexander.

self-possession necessary to execute them, I would like it very much. My appearance of *hurry* I have no doubt is partly real hurry. I felt I was losing time, and boring everybody to death. One of your sentences amuses me. You speak of *oratorical* enjoyment, etc. I was in pandemonium all the time, and the feeling I had about you and the crowd of persons present was that you were all grinning and mocking at everything I said. I have had this morbid imagination all my life, and unfortunately it is not confined to preaching, but extends to other regions of conduct and feeling as well. I have not felt it in such a degree as I did on Sunday for a long time, however.— I am, yours very truly, A. B. DAVIDSON.'

Verily a preacher *malgré lui*. Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel, and also woe is me if I preach it. But that was the morbid, 'blue Monday' view of the matter, and there can be no doubt that if Davidson had ceased to be a preacher he would have lost one of the chief elements of his life's happiness. No man knew better how 'the burden of the word of the Lord' is lifted from the prophet anointed to preach good tidings. And it should be remembered that his

sermons were not by any means so few as his friends believed, and as he was quite willing that they should believe. Mr. Morgan of Viewforth Church, Edinburgh, wrote in 1902 : ' Professor Davidson was well known to my congregation. He very frequently occupied the pulpit, and on each occasion was most cordially welcomed. He was always most obliging and willing to help ; and it came at length to this, that he had preached all his sermons to my people.' There must be some mistake here, otherwise Viewforth has much to answer for in the Day of Judgment. Probably Dr. Davidson preached in that church half a dozen times in all. But some thirty sermons of his have been published, a good many more exist in manuscript, and one has heard the texts or titles of many others which their author must have destroyed.

Of the published sermons a writer in the *Union Magazine* has said : ' The undogmatic tone of the Old Testament marks them all. Nothing could be less professional, nothing more absolutely free from the faintest association of either church or school. There is plenty of faith in them, in the simple Old Testament sense of faith in God ;

plenty of agnosticism too—not of the self-complacent sort, but true, grave, and wistful ; and where the tragedy of the subject moves the writer deeply, as in the magnificent close of the sermon on Saul, a passion that rises to a height rarely equalled in poetry.’¹

Testimonies to the effect of the sermons as preached are numerous. Two or three will suffice. ‘ I remember vividly,’ writes a man of the Lews,² ‘ my first glimpse of Dr. Davidson. He was preaching in David Guthrie’s church at Liberton. It was the Sunday evening before the New College opened in 1879. I had just arrived in Edinburgh, and I persuaded a young medical to accompany me. Davidson’s fame as a preacher had travelled far, and it was a bit of good fortune to have so early a chance of hearing him. His careful mounting of the low pulpit gave the impression of feebleness. He rose and gave out the Psalm, in a thin voice that rang disappointment to my heart. But his prayer soon revived my drooping feelings. It eschewed ritual, the even flow of half-felt words, and the edged appeal

¹ *Union Magazine*, vol. iii. p. 138, probably Dr. Denney.

² Rev. Norman Macfarlane, minister of Juniper Green.

of a soul in need rose to Heaven. Who can ever forget Davidson's prayers? Even that first prayer had the feeling of the stony hillside and golden ladder. His sermon was on Thomas. Its freshness, its spiritual insight, its passion made on us both a profound impression. Again and again my companion's eyes and mine turned toward each other under the thrill. We walked home with a suggestion of Emmaus in our hearts. The next time I heard him was on a winter evening at Wardie, in a small iron church. It was always small churches that Davidson affected. It was a long trudge to Granton Road, but what were miles when Davidson was at the other end? His sermon that evening was on Elijah. There were moments of hush and there were moments of tingle, and I remember heaving a breath of relief after one of his great passages. The feeling held one that no man could preach like *that* who was not himself related to Elijah.'

'I never,' writes a Leith minister, 'missed an opportunity of hearing Professor Davidson preach. And those occasions stand out vividly in my memory. I heard him, for instance, preach in Warrender Park Church, a temporary structure

at that time. The sermon was on St. Mark's little parable of the gradual growth of the seed. I heard him again in Pilrig Church on the Rich Young Ruler. He was moved almost to tears, and he moved his hearers almost to tears, as he pictured with insight and passion that great refusal.'

In 1887 Taylor Innes wrote a descriptive sketch of 'Professor A. B. Davidson in the Pulpit.' 'In his Hebrew class,' said the eminent advocate, 'he reigns with an influence which has spread through his native country, and is not inferior to that of any Scottish Chair in the present age. . . . Is the influence which has done so much to mould the ardent youth of Scotland a personal influence? and is it merely critical and negative? In our perplexity it is a relief to know that Professor Davidson is an occasional preacher; in the opinion of shrewd judges one of the best in Britain, and certainly one of the best who are also Professors. Every one does not know it, not even in Edinburgh. The preacher seems to take the same sort of precautions against popularity that some do to procure it. . . . He has no stock of sermons—never had; and he produces a new one after six months—the period that precedes the

parturition of the average volcano. But what is important is that he never produces one at all except when, like the volcano, he has something to utter—something, indeed, which insists upon being uttered. . . . The background and beginning and ordinary stuff of his discourse are tender and impressive ; never vivid in colouring, yet never destitute of the deep and touching hues with which personal need and personal aspiration suffuse the mind. And long before he is done you have your answer to the question whether he is exclusively negative or critical. In his sermons, whatever may be the case with his other writings, there is no criticism or negation at all. You are back to Job and his absorbing passion, “ Oh that I knew where I might find Him ! ” And it is no distant or ceremonial access, no formal salvation that we feel we need. In these sermons the weariness and guilt and evil of life press so heavily upon the worshipper, the darkness stretches out so strangling a gripe upon his very life, that you turn with a cry to the Divine for help, and refuse from that centre to depart. But by the time the service is over you cease to wonder that the students of the College that rises on the site of

Mary of Guise's Edinburgh Palace, find or surmise under the gritty rind of their Oriental Grammar something positive, personal, and holding of the Highest.' ¹

Professor John Mackenzie of Madras, a mathematician and physicist who died young, used to say that when listening to Davidson he had the greatest difficulty in preventing himself from rising and crying out. He accounted for this by saying that it was the highest conceivable form of energy which was making its impact upon the mind of the hearer, and almost demanding physical response.

Many who listened to Davidson could, I imagine, confirm that impression. I remember hearing him preach one Sunday in the Free New North Church, when Dr. R. G. Balfour was minister there. On that particular morning we were in the grip of the mood which makes the world appear stale, flat, and unprofitable. The melancholy fit that falls like a weeping cloud was upon us, and it was vain to ask the cause of our dejection. Life was a mystery, and we seemed to be on the verge of tragedy. The words were

¹ *British Weekly*.

quoted, not with a rhetorician's but a sufferer's perfect accents :

Be near me when my light is low,
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
And tingle ; and the heart is sick,
And all the wheels of Being slow.

Will the prayer be heard, or is nothing before us but a deepening darkness on the way to dusty death ? Suddenly there is a quickening movement, a streak of light, a breath of dawn, and a thrill of pleasure. Something is going to happen, and soon we know what it is. ' Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice before the Lord, for He cometh.' He who cometh is GOD. The word God was uttered with amazing passion, and followed, like the highest notes of a great orchestra, by a pause. And it was while that pause lasted for a minute that you had the impulse to leap to your feet and cry out. You drove the nails deep into your flesh to keep yourself quiet. You wanted to be on a pinnacle or a mountain top, shouting ' Hallelujah ! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth ! ' Years afterwards I had precisely the same sensation in witnessing a perfect sunrise from the top of the Jungfrau, when with

two companions I relieved my feelings by ecstatically shouting, 'Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe!'

In February 1888 Professor Davidson gave the New College Missionary Society an address which he modestly entitled 'Remarks on Preaching.' It is one of the best things he ever wrote, and ought, of course, to have been published among his posthumous works. Readers will be grateful for some extracts from it. The opening is characteristic. The lecturer feels that he has nothing to say and that he is in the wrong place. In his own classroom he is able to look down on other men. 'Even the Principal does not know all about Daghesh. But when I come here my self-confidence deserts me, my locks are shorn, and I feel weak like other men or even weaker.' Still, he will venture on some remarks.

'The first has reference to the preacher himself, and it is to the effect that the preacher should preach. And he should not do anything else, for example read an essay, or a dissertation, nor even give an exposition of Scripture merely as an exposition, without making it a direct sermon and appeal to men. Preaching consists of two things: one thing is the message from God to men with

which the preacher is entrusted, and the other is the personality of the preacher himself, through whom the message is sent. The two cannot be separated, the first is meant to be coloured always by the second. This is not merely a Divine ordinance, it appears to be a human necessity. As of old, the truth must be incarnated before men will be touched by it. Even God Himself came down among us in the flesh, and the lips of Jesus made the gracious words that proceeded from them the more gracious, and when He put His human hand to the blind eyes and they saw, it was a more lovely thing than if He had opened them by a mere act of will. The message from God cannot be separated from the human personality who delivers it—it must be his message as well as God's.

‘ Does this imply that we are never to go beyond our own experience in preaching ? It seems to me that it does. It may be said that we find such and such things in Scripture, and that we preach not ourselves but Christ, and that we should declare the whole counsel of God. The apostles did not preach themselves ; they were keenly alive to the fact that their message was

from God. But I doubt if any one of them ever uttered a word which had not been made fully his own, or preached any truth or experience which he had not himself felt. The early preachers were witnesses for Christ, and in this their successors must resemble them.

‘ But in truth an earnest mind will probably be able to preach almost anything in Scripture without going beyond its own experience—that is, the earnest mind will always be in such a condition of sympathy, at least, with those things in Scripture even which it may not have fully experienced, that it will be able to preach them in a certain manner, in such a manner that the hearer will quite understand them, and the mind itself will not feel that it is acting untruly to itself—for it is here that the danger of preaching beyond one’s own experience lies. When one finds his mind cold and hard, without an emotion toward God, the very consciousness of his state will give him an affinity for the condition which he desiderates and project him into it, and his references to it, though perhaps straitened and very sober, will possess a pathos which would be wanting in a more ecstatic condition. And in like manner, when one is

sceptical or dubious, the very struggle will stir the nature to its deeps—and sermons spoken in such a condition may be the most powerful that can be preached. Men will feel the working of a human mind exercised with problems of life and death, and you will be nearer many hearers tenfold than ever you were in the highest flights of assurance. . . .

‘If the preacher never goes beyond his own experience, but preaches always that which he feels, there will be such a reality about his work, that it will not only command attention, but it will amount to originality. None of us is strictly original. Originality is just personality. Every man is original who is personal and not conventional. If one really thinks and feels, and does not merely repeat forms of expression by memory, his thoughts will be felt to be unlike those of any one else; men will discover themselves in contact with a living soul and mind, and will be constrained to listen. . . .

‘And the preacher must preach God’s truth in such a way as to make men feel that it is God’s truth. The old reverence for the word of God and the preacher’s function is gone; men demand of revelation that it should approve itself to be

revelation. And this is a demand which revelation is quite equal to meet. It met this demand at the beginning of Christianity, and it is quite able to meet it still. It approved itself then to be the message from God to men, with no other evidence than the response which it awakened in men's hearts, and it has not lost its power. . . .

‘Two or three years ago Dr. Walter Smith gave an address at some meeting here, and advised the study of science to the preacher. Perhaps the advice was good—the preacher should certainly know science in self-defence. But science, so far as I know, has never added one moral conception to the thought of mankind. And we are not going to surrender to scientists three-fourths of the product of the thought of mankind merely because we are told that it cannot be verified in the crucible. My impression is that literature is the most profitable study for the preacher, for there the human mind in all its breadth, its emotions, its aspirations, its idealism, its griefs and cries over failure—in a word, its humanity—is to be seen. . . .

‘When we read some of the great dramatic writers, and feel amazed at the subtlety with

which they delineate the workings of the human mind, the truthfulness to nature and life with which they make men act, we sometimes attribute it to a certain instinct, a certain fulness of humanity in their nature which spontaneously expresses itself and is independent of observation. There is no doubt a fulness of humanity in them and a creative power. But probably the elements of what they produce have been taken in by observation. The threads of the web which their minds weave have been picked up separately. They have been in situations which suggested their fully wrought-out scenes. They have observed traits and features in some one which they develop into their great characters. They have heard stray notes of music in life which they unite into their most imposing harmonies. And the preacher too must be observant—with a kindly and keen eye. Even our Lord learned by the things which He suffered—He *became* from His human life a merciful High Priest. And the servant is not above His Master.'

Dr. Taylor Innes suggests that there is a biographical key to Davidson's sermons, or at least that there are bits of autobiography in them.

There probably are in most sermons, but it would require divining power of the rarest quality to detect them in utterances of a nature so self-contained. The best preacher, like the true artist, never obtrudes himself. What does the writer of *Job* or of *Hamlet* tell us about himself? Everything and nothing. On this subject Dr. Davidson held strong opinions, which he has expressed in another paragraph of the above lecture. 'When I say that the preacher should speak his own experience, it is not meant that he should refer to himself in illustration or let his own experience come formally into view. There is nothing more repulsive than egotistical preaching—references to one's own deep experiences. Such things may tell once in a way. People will gape when they hear them even when repeated, but they would gape if you told them anything personal, though it were about your wife's wardrobe or your children's teething. A man may never allude to himself and yet speak in such a way as to make men feel that everything he says has been graven deep by the pen of actual experience on his own heart.'

There were not many occasions on which Davidson was so thoroughly happy as when he

came to quiet country parishes to see his students enter upon the work of their first ministry. I have several accounts of those memorable days, but *ex uno disce omnia*. 'He did me the great honour,' writes Professor Gordon, 'of introducing me to my congregation at Monikie. That was truly a day of days. In the morning he preached on the Rich Young Ruler, closing with a few words of commendation which remain a sacred memory. After the evening service we had a delightful walk—it was early in June—and he seemed to enjoy it as much as I did. He told me with a chuckle that he had been asked to preach in Edinburgh that day, and that he could not well have refused, had he not "very fortunately" had this engagement. In the manse and along the country road—whenever he met any of the people—he was the soul of Christian courtesy and bonhomie. The people there still remember his visit as a red-letter day.'

Professor Davidson was himself a great lover of good preaching, and while he always protested that he was 'no judge,' his opinions of the preachers and sermons he heard were invariably interesting. His summer wanderings gave him

the opportunity of hearing strangers. 'Young ministers,' writes one of them, 'are naturally shy of preaching in the presence of a Professor. But Davidson was an excellent and most patient listener, very tolerant when one was evidently doing his best, though a mordant critic of scamped or shallow work. I remember his hearing a sermon on "A Door was opened in Heaven," which contained some good things on the general idea of heaven revealing itself on earth. He was reluctant to give any opinion; but, when pressed, admitted that it was not a style of exegesis he cared for. "You might make the text say anything you like."'¹ In South Morningside Church he heard a stranger preach a sermon in which there was an imaginative and almost geographical description of heaven. He did not like it. 'I would rather,' he said, 'go out into the darkness than follow the light of such a penny candle as that.'

He had a profound reverence for the man who lets the duties of the ministry absorb him, giving himself wholly to them, in the Pauline phrase.²

¹ Rev. D. C. Macgregor, minister in Wimbledon, formerly of Elie.

² 1 Tim. iv. 15.

The preacher must be *totus in illis*. That, he held, was the true secret of preaching, and that was how he, a mere Professor, could not preach. 'When I was in charge of Warrender Park,' writes Norman Macfarlane, 'in its beginning as a church, I asked him to take a service in my absence. He was most obliging, and agreed. He said, "You know I can't preach. Preaching is a great thing, and quite beyond me." That, I replied, was one voice against the whole world's. "Ah!" he rejoined, "one must be always at it, always in the stream, if he is to preach."' "

Dr. Fairweather gives an illustration, amusing in its way, of Davidson's invariable habit of standing up for any good and faithful minister who was not exactly 'popular'—a word which, as he pronounced it, was scarcely more than two syllables, the middle vowel fading, I suppose, into a *sheva*. Thirty years ago there was an excellent minister in North Berwick, who was sometimes adversely criticised. Davidson was down there golfing, and one evening dined at the house of Mrs. Black, Dr. Fairweather's mother-in-law. The table-talk came round to Mr. S., who fared rather badly, until Mrs. Black remarked, 'Ah,

well, I must say I like Mr. S. very well.' 'So do I, Mrs. Black,' said Davidson, 'and that is a minority which should be weighed, not counted.' By way of proving Mr. S.'s inefficiency, some one said that a New College professor had recently been assisting him at Communion, and been so little satisfied with Mr. S.'s preaching that he insisted upon taking the Thanksgiving Service on the following day himself. 'Very likely,' answered Davidson, 'but I prefer Mr. S. to Dr. B. any day.' Then, as a final and convincing argument on the other side, someone else mentioned that Robertson Smith, who had been there some weeks before, had been so little edified by Mr. S.'s preaching that he had gone to sleep during the sermon. 'Ah, well,' said Davidson, 'in that case Smith probably *dreamed* that S. was a great deal worse than he was.'

He used to say that Dr. Rainy, when in preaching form—it must be admitted that there was some emphasis on the qualifying words—was the best preacher in Scotland. And he was a very warm admirer of Dr. George Matheson, readily excusing all the vagaries of the blind preacher's exegesis. 'We have a great deal of talent in the

Edinburgh pulpit,' he said, 'but Matheson has genius.' His frequent visits to London gave him the opportunity of hearing many famous men. He liked Temple, and once told me, with a note of awe in his voice, that the greatest sermon he ever heard in his life was one preached by Lightfoot. He had not an extensive acquaintance with sermon literature. He tried Maclaren of Manchester, but was not 'found' by that great preacher. No one will be surprised, however, that when I asked whose sermons he cared most to read, he named Robertson of Brighton's. For between Davidson in middle life and Robertson, whose spirit burned itself out so soon, there were certain strongly marked affinities—the same ardent temperament, the same thirst for reality, the same inexorable conscience, the same apparent aloofness and real longing for affection, the same individuality combined with freedom from egoism, the same absorbing and passionate sense of God. Happily a defect which Dr. Hort¹ noted in Robertson could never be ascribed to Davidson: 'His total want of humour marks a really important narrowness of temperament; his serious-

¹ Hort's *Life and Letters*, ii. p. 68.

ness would gain, not lose, by some relief.' It was indeed a merciful Providence which gave Davidson that happy laughter which has its home near the fountain of tears. One suspects that there were times not a few in his life when he felt inclined to say with his countrywoman Lady Grizel Baillie, 'And werena my heart light I wad dee.'

In a review of Davidson's *Waiting on God*, the last of the posthumous works, Dr. Peake says: 'We should not be surprised if this volume should, for its intrinsic value, prove to be worth a score of the average volumes of sermons. On the whole, we regard this as probably the best and most satisfactory work of Dr. Davidson's that has been published since the author's death.' And in concluding this chapter one heartily endorses these words of Dr. Hastings: 'In spite of all that has been said, in spite of all that he himself said, Dr. Davidson was a preacher first and a preacher most. In the preacher we found the man.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRITER

It was in 1861 that Davidson, then thirty, made his first important contribution to theological literature. For the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* he wrote an article of some forty pages, on 'The recent Introductions to the Old Testament.' The six books reviewed were all by foreign writers—Keil, Bleek, Hupfeld, and others—with the exception of a learned *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, in two volumes, by Donald M'Donald, minister of Edinkellie. In his criticism of this now forgotten book Davidson praises the conscientious and laborious effort of the writer, and still more the 'loving and reverent spirit' in which the work was done. But he has to point out the radical defect of the book, and 'it cost his kind heart some pangs when he learned that M'Donald was deeply wounded by his article.'¹ The critic clearly indicates—and this

¹ Sir W. R. Nicoll.

is the main interest of the article—that no progress is possible until theology relates itself to history. ‘ Mr. M'Donald has not seen or seized this fact, that revelation is a process, having a special end in view, and working itself out by slow and gradually increasing strides. . . . He has missed the admirable opportunity he had of giving us what we never yet have had, at least the sketch of a historical theology of the Old Testament. No such historic theology is possible under his theory. For, by dissevering revelation from its immediate relation to man, its historic unity is broken up; it can, at most, be sporadic flashes of the Divine, of which we can neither see the immediate cause nor the general connection. . . . Revelation is a thing given by God to men, but given so as to work itself out through men, and it conforms rigidly to the usual laws of history and progress; there is nothing disjointed or isolated in it, and where we find passages clearly Messianic, apparently disconnected, we must explain them by the general modes of thought and life of the people into which they fitted, and out of which they sprung.’ The scholar's own life-work is thus clearly outlined. Old Testament theology must,

he saw, be made historical. As yet, however, his critical task was scarcely begun, and at this stage he thought that the words of Christ shut him up to believe in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He re-expressed this opinion two years later, shortly before his appointment as a professor, in a valuable criticism of Colenso's *Pentateuch and Book of Joshua*. 'Jesus says, *Moses wrote of Me*; and thus, as a matter of faith, it must be held, *first*, that Moses penned some parts of the Pentateuch, and that these related to Christ. Whether these were direct allusions to the Messiah, or . . . indirect, or perhaps both, as is most probable, in any case we are bound to say Moses wrote of Christ. *Second*, Christ speaks generally of the Pentateuch under the name of Moses. He used in this respect, no doubt, current human language. He nowhere says Moses wrote all the Pentateuch, as He says, he wrote of Me. This current language can be fairly justified if Moses wrote some part, or at least the chief part, if he was the most important writer of the five books, contributing the main element of the legislation. In no other way could his name be fairly used as the author of the

Pentateuch; and therefore, to this extent, at a stride, we go in the criticism of the Pentateuch.'¹ Davidson would not 'shake the head' at such men as Kurtz and Delitzsch, but that was his own view. And, sooth to say, one cannot but be glad that it was, for if he had, in the article named, expressed the contrary opinion, it is certain that not he but Murray Mitchell would have occupied the Hebrew Chair in the New College during the next generation.

At that time, and for some years to come, Davidson was earnestly grappling with such subjects as Types and Sacrifices, and many early lectures on these topics are to be found among his papers, in addition to those which have been posthumously unearthed. It was necessary for him to make up his mind on these matters, for all the pulpits in the land were ringing with them, and to neglect them was impossible.² And so long as he adhered to the old view of the Pentateuch, he was logically bound to assume that the Law was the text of the Prophets. But as he continued his

¹ *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, April 1863, p. 391.

² The whole subject of Types is now dead and buried. Neither Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* nor the *Encyclopædia Biblica* has an article under such a heading.

studies, he became ever less sure of his ground, and finally was convinced that the old theory was untenable. Before the end of the sixties he had abandoned it. He moved very cautiously, but all his subsequent studies were based on the assumption that the Prophets were independent of the Law. Yet his discarded view is solemnly reproduced in the posthumous *Old Testament Prophecy*. Glancing at a few pages of this book, we read, 'For Prophecy stood on the foundation of the Law.'¹ The Law was 'the unchangeable element, the constant condition of communion with God.'² The Prophets 'expounded the Law.'³ 'The text of all Prophecy is the book of Deuteronomy.'⁴ *Et passim*. If a statesman, scientist, or other man of action or thought, has ended his career in the days of King Edward or King George, should we honour his name or add to his fame by collecting and publishing the views he inherited and tentatively held in the mid-Victorian period? To do so would be to assume the rôle of Autolycus—a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles—as well as to put a fool's cap on the head that should wear laurels. The man

¹ p. 3.² p. 8.³ p. 107.⁴ p. 109.

who never changes his opinions has no opinions to change, but only prejudices ; and is there any teacher who would not rather be forgotten than immortalised by the errors of his youth ? It was in reference to this posthumous work that Professor James Robertson of Glasgow, who has shared with Dr. Davidson, his nearly lifelong friend, the honour of the Semitic revival in Scotland, gravely remarked, ‘ *I should not like to have my discarded lectures, or the undigested contents of my forgotten notebooks, given to the public.*’

Professor Davidson nowhere tells us exactly how the change in his own critical views was effected. But what he wrote long afterwards in reviewing Driver’s *Introduction* applies equally to his own case. ‘ Some may argue that, be the results of criticism true or false, Christianity is independent of them. That it is independent of them we believe to be absolutely true, but this is not clear to every one, and perhaps it is clear to few at first sight, for even those who are now able to contemplate critical results with perfect composure can remember an earlier period in their history when their minds were assailed by serious

perplexities. Canon Driver is too robust a man to expose his inward history, but probably the position which he is able to hold has been gained after the manner of men. . . . We suspect that if the fundamental premiss be granted in the Pentateuch, the main conclusions of modern criticism are inevitable. If there are documents, they are those which scholars have succeeded in disentangling ; and if these are the documents, they are of the dates assigned to them, that of the latest, the Priests' Code, in its present form being after the Exile. The date of the writings, however, and the date of the practices and thoughts contained in them, are different things, and even many elements contained in a book may be drawn from older written sources.' ¹

In 1862 Davidson's first *Job* was published, the book in reference to which the old 'Rabbi' and Professor Blackie, and indeed everybody who deigned to make a very obvious pun, constantly asked him when his job would be finished. It was certainly a great loss to scholarship that only the first half of the Commentary was ever published. The small demand for the book, and the

¹ *The Bookman*, November 1891, p. 69.

considerable financial loss to the author, discouraged him, and he handed over the notes he had prepared for the second volume to Dr. Samuel Cox, who had begun to work at the same subject. Yet among true scholars the book marked the advent of the critical and historical method of interpreting the books of the Bible, and it ranks with such great commentaries as those of Lightfoot on the Pauline Epistles. Open it anywhere, and you find that the whole apparatus of scholarship has been conscientiously used, while the small type is plentifully sprinkled not only with Hebrew, but with Arabic and Syriac characters. Yet both the humanity and the divinity of the book made an appeal to other readers than Hebrew scholars, as is proved by the following note from Dr. Whyte: 'The good I got from Davidson was less from his class than from his *Job*. I read and read again that epoch-making book, till my eyes were opened to Old Testament things as never before.' The verve, the élan, the audacity, the splendid diction of that first volume scarcely appear in any of the author's later books published during his lifetime. There was no reason, however, for the suggestion that,

unlike the thrush, he never could recapture that first fine careless rapture. There was a prosaic reason for the more subdued manner of his later books. They were all written at the request of some general editor, who of course expected each contributor to conform to the pattern shown on the editorial mount. In the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, and *Handbooks for Bible Classes*, not to speak of *Bible Class Primers*, Davidson gave us admirable guides to important Old Testament and New Testament books. But he was all the time cramped like an artist who has to paint on too small a canvas. It was only in the great lectures and sermons that we heard the Davidson of the first *Job*. His second Commentary on that book (published in 1884) is of course in some respects more reliable than the earlier work. Yet one returns to the first volume with ever fresh delight, and perhaps with a certain feeling of regret that the writer did not take his courage in his hand and persevere until he had compelled a reluctant Church to appreciate exegetical work so noble alike in its conception and its execution.

From one who knows everything about jour-

nalism, I learn that Davidson, like several other Free Church scholars, was a contributor to the literary columns of the *Daily Review*, in which 'there is a lot of our Free Church work buried.'¹ But his second important article, like his first, appeared in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*. He wrote it during the first phase of the Robertson Smith case, and entitled it a 'Review of Works on Old Testament Theology in 1878.' The occasion of the article was the following note from the editor, Professor James Candlish: 'I write to say that I hope you can certainly give me an article on Deuteronomy for the April number of the *B. and F.* Dr. Murphy of Belfast has offered me a lecture on that subject referring to Smith's article. I do not think I can refuse an article on that side without exposing myself to the charge of partiality. At any rate, if I declined that, I could hardly admit one on the other side, and to shirk all discussion of the subject would, I think, be a weak and unworthy policy. After admitting Dr. Murphy there would be more justification for another article on the other side, provided you had no objection to come after

¹ Letter from Sir W. R. Nicoll.

him. You can either take notice of his arguments or not, as you think best after seeing them. But in the present state of things I should not like to give publication to an article that would bear against Smith unless I could be sure of its being followed by one on the other side. So I should like to be able to rely upon you for such a one in April.'

The article duly appeared, and Dr. Carnegie Simpson calls it a 'non-committal article.'¹ In that phrase he unconsciously does injustice to one of his teachers. Certainly it was not a non-committal review that Dr. Candlish asked for. He had a contribution on the one side, and asked for an article 'on the other side,' a phrase which he uses three times over in his letter. And if Dr. Carnegie Simpson could hear that article read as a New College lecture in the old classroom and in the old way—his heart remembers how—I am certain that neither he nor any other hearer would go away complaining that the article was non-committal. It contains some 'perhapes,' but Davidson's 'perhaps' did not imply doubt in his mind so much as scrupulous regard for the rational working of the minds of others, and determination

¹ *The Life of Principal Rainy*, i. p. 354.

to lead, not drive. After stating the now familiar arguments for the critical theory—the differences between Deuteronomy and Leviticus, the chasm between law and practice, the silence of the early Prophets, and so on—he says : ‘ Of course there are arguments on the other side ; but there are many candid minds, especially those accustomed to historical criticism, which feel the considerations just mentioned to be irresistible arguments for assigning Deuteronomy to the historical period with which it exhibits such close connection.’ And then he proceeds to quote with approval the words of Delitzsch, that ‘ it will scarcely be possible to eradicate the ruling critical opinion that Deuteronomy was composed in the time of Jeremiah ’ ; to recommend very warmly the *Old Testament Theology* of Schultz, who is ‘ a convert ’ to a new theory ; and finally to say a few words regarding Wellhausen, whose Pomeranian style one may not quite like, but whose essay is brilliantly written, and who has ‘ for the first time comprehended the whole problem,’ though of course he does wrong to be silent with regard to the all-important religious aspect of the question.

Prominent members of the Edinburgh Presby-

tery were so far from thinking that the two professors had not committed themselves, that a special meeting had to be held to deal with an Overture to the Assembly for the appointment of a Commission to inquire into the 'theological teaching of the Colleges.' In opposing this course, Dr. Rainy used two arguments, the one general and the other special. (1) 'On questions of this kind there must be liberty to exchange our minds as to the weight or value of the considerations on either side which ought to influence us'; and (2) 'I confess I wonder that while another case is still pursuing its course to settlement, men should think it a service to the Church to plunge us just now into two more cases.'¹ The majority of the Presbytery listened to reason. 'Liberty to exchange our minds' was precisely what Rainy had won twenty-one years before for the Glasgow students, and now he won it for the two impeached professors—Candlish and Davidson.

In 1878 Professor Davidson began to write for the *Expositor*, which had been founded three years before by Dr. Samuel Cox, and he was a contributor until 1900. His articles are class

¹ *Daily Review*, February 12, 1880.

lectures prepared for publication, and it is evident that he took the utmost pains with them. To the Prophets and the Messianic Psalms he returned with ever new delight, and the lectures on Hosea and the Second Isaiah appear among his papers in half a score of forms. The *Expositor* articles are marked by 'a patient and determined precision of thinking, and often a *curiosa felicitas* in expression.'¹ Probably few articles have ever been subjected to more of Horace's *limæ labor et mora*. One does not mean that Davidson cared for style as much as for truth. But he had the keenest enjoyment of good writing, and he never let anything out of his hands until it was as nearly perfect as he could make it. Yet my impression is that when he was in the vein, composition was as easy for him as it was delightful. At such times 'he could play with words and summon adjectives like a magician.'² The first two articles which he wrote for the First Series of the *Expositor* are upon 'The Various Kinds of Messianic Prophecy.' They are beaten gold, and though the writer afterwards changed his opinions on certain points, it is still a pure delight to read them. A few footnotes

¹ *Union Magazine*, iii. p. 138.

² Claudius Clear.

would have made them ready for publication after his death. But his editor ignored them—one cannot believe that he was ignorant of them. He found an old manuscript of seven thousand words, the rough block out of which the sculptor's hand carved the finished work—the above *Expositor* articles of five thousand words. It is of course interesting to have before us both the unfinished and the finished product, for we are enabled to see a fastidious scholar at work, and to mark the deft and subtle changes which he introduces. But to publish the sketch, with all its glaring imperfections, and say not a word of the finished articles, was to expose a scholar's name to ridicule.

No lecture of Professor Davidson's was finer than the one on 'False Prophecy.' Students' notebooks show that it was delivered, of course with frequent changes, to every class for thirty years, and it was ultimately published in the *Expositor* in 1895. It was one of those articles which a scholar might well be willing to send down to posterity as an example of his finest literary workmanship, even apart from the profound conceptions which it embodies. But in the posthumous *Old Testament Prophecy* an ancient and

greatly inferior manuscript has again been palmed off upon the innocent reader, while the perfect *Expositor* article is left in obscurity.

Dr. Davidson gave a great amount of thought to the question of the date of the Messianic Psalms, recurring to the problem year after year. In the posthumous volume of *Biblical and Literary Essays*, three chapters—fifty-four pages—are devoted to this theme. Here we find the antiquated view that the Messiah of the 2nd Psalm is Solomon in ‘his uncorrupted youth.’¹ The 72nd Psalm was probably written by Solomon, in whom ‘passion had given way to reflection,’ and the ‘colouring of the piece agrees with Solomon’s reign.’² The 110th Psalm may be ascribed to David, although ‘critics have not been unanimous.’³ And of course we find all this, or something very like it, in the *Old Testament Prophecy*. These three Psalms belong ‘to the time of the early monarchy, when great hopes were entertained of the Davidic house, particularly of its first members, David and Solomon.’⁴

All these opinions belong to Davidson’s youth, and his mature views are stated in unpublished

¹ p. 151 f.

² p. 163.

³ 177 f.

⁴ p. 280.

lectures in language which is absolutely clear. As the matter is of great importance, I quote the following passages from a lecture dated 1890, setting them over against those fifty-four pages in one posthumous book and very numerous passages in another. 'The Psalms show that the general teaching of the Prophets regarding the Kingdom had penetrated into the general mind ; that their conceptions formed a faith, the great elements of which continually recur in prayers and praise to the Lord, as much as the elements of our Christian faith recur in our hymns of praise and adoration and prayer. Is it not probable that the other elements of the eschatological picture of the Personal Ruler, who appears in all the Prophets with few exceptions, certainly in late Prophets like Zechariah and Malachi, should also have been made the subject of reflection and have entered into the general consciousness of the people, so as also to reappear in hymns of praise or in prayers ? This seems not only probable in itself, but is an idea that more easily explains several of the Psalms than any other supposition. Such Psalms are ii, lxxii, and, as I think, cx. Of these perhaps the 72nd is simplest. The Psalm is

very remarkable, resembling a modern composition almost in the orderliness of its line of thought and the logical strictness with which all the characteristics of the Kingdom follow from its fundamental characteristic of righteousness. . . . Now when we consider, first that the ideas expressed here are just the great Messianic conceptions of the Prophets, and that they are all here accumulated so as to give an exhaustive picture, showing that the ideas were all familiar ; second, the smooth and flowing style of the passage, which has none of the ruggedness of ancient poetry ; and, finally, when we consider the surprising breadth of the conceptions—all kings shall bow down before Him, all nations shall serve Him—the consideration of these things certainly makes it probable that the Psalm is an ideal of the Messianic king and kingdom, and not of any particular king who actually reigned. . . . But even then there does not appear any necessity for bringing it very far down. Jeremiah's designation of the Messianic King as "the Lord is our righteousness" resembles it in some ways.'

It is extremely difficult to account for the neglect of these and many other lectures, which

contain the latest and carefully balanced judgments of this scholar, while a strange assortment of impossible opinions—like old and cast-off garments now all moth-eaten—are brought forth as the final faith which he is to bequeath to posterity ! Either the editor did not read these latest lectures, which is exceedingly unlikely ; or he thought them early and negligible, which is still more unlikely ; or, to exhaust the possibilities, he read them with pain, did not agree with them, and thought it better to suppress them, which is quite beyond belief. I confess I have tried in vain to solve this puzzle, and been obliged to give it up. I would fain pass the whole matter over in silence, but that would clearly be wrong. It is due to the dead master's memory that the facts should be stated. 'For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are ; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.'¹

¹ Milton's *Areopagitica*.

While it is true that many of Davidson's lectures are not dated, a considerable number of important ones are. But in any case there is never the slightest difficulty in assigning an approximate date to any of his manuscripts. The problem of higher criticism is here quite simple. For one thing, Davidson had a most interesting handwriting. His early lectures are written on small sheets of dark blue and now fading paper, in an exquisitely neat and almost microscopic hand, sometimes trying even to good eyes. While this is the style of his first period, the lectures of his middle age are on ordinary sermon paper, in a stronger and perfectly legible hand, and those of his last decade, *e.g.* the great lecture on 'The Uses of the Old Testament for Edification,'¹ are beautifully written in 'large letters' and widely separated lines, delightfully easy to read. In addition to this, almost every lecture contains a reference to some lately published book, or some recent event—*e.g.* Carlyle's Rectorial address in 1865—which makes it an easy task to date any particular lecture. Finally, there are carefully

¹ This was the introductory lecture of the session 1899-1900, but it is dated 1892. See *Expositor*, vi. i. 1 f.

treasured students' notebooks, which one can procure for every decade in which Davidson taught. So that the editor's complaint that 'there was not the slightest clue to the order in which the various lectures had been delivered' is truly amazing.

Dr. Davidson's posthumous *Old Testament Theology* is a much more valuable book than the *Old Testament Prophecy*, though here too one cannot but wish that the editorial work had been entrusted to such an Old Testament scholar as Dr. Skinner or Sir G. A. Smith. For the errors in Hebrew are very numerous—one comes upon as many as three in three successive lines.¹ And the amount of repetition is very provoking, not only single sentences but paragraphs and even whole pages appearing two or three times in different parts of the book. And the titles chosen for the chapters are far from being the most appropriate and attractive. All the same, the volume contains a series of very valuable studies on Old Testament themes. The book is not an Old Testament Theology in the strict sense of the word. In later

¹ A formidable list is given in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, by C. F. Burney.

life Dr. Davidson frequently used such language as the following, which Dr. Salmond does not seem to have noticed. 'A theology of the Old Testament is really an impossibility, because the Old Testament is not a homogeneous whole. We see the religious truths or beliefs presented there coming into existence in connection with historical events extending over a thousand years. Instead of an Old Testament theology, the utmost that can be given is, A historical view of the religion of Israel ; or, of the religion of Revelation during the Old Testament period. The truths can neither be exhibited nor understood apart from the history.' ¹

Scarcely any of Professor Davidson's lectures have headings in his manuscripts, and his sermons have texts but never titles. It is often a difficult and delicate task to choose the right and fitting title. 'One day,' writes an old student, 'he happened to be lecturing on the Sympathy of Nature with God and with Man. As usual the class began to take notes of the lecture ; but so electrified did they become with the originality and spirituality of the lecturer, that it became quite impossible to con-

¹ *Critical Review*, i. p. 29 (1891).

tinue taking notes. Every student was simply spell-bound till the close of the lecture. As a proof of the impression made on the class, they met spontaneously after the lecture and asked the Professor, through a deputation, if he would do them the favour of re-delivering the lecture.' This lecture, based upon Genesis i. and the Psalms of Nature, deals with the relations of science and faith. Near its beginning we read, 'An attempt has been made to elevate some parts of this poetry into a distinct and more exalted category, to which the name of Natural Symbolism has been given. I think it enough to deny the existence of any such symbolism.' Yet the lecture is editorially headed 'The Interpretation of Natural Symbolism in Poetry' ! *Lucus a non lucendo !*

Perhaps the lecture (or sermon, for that is a matter of indifference) which has the first place in the memory of most of Davidson's students is the one on Saul. Whether we accept its exegesis or not—and every scholar has the right to his own interpretation—there is scarcely anything in modern sermon literature to equal it in passion and power. Many generations of students knew it as the lecture on 'Saul'—that and nothing

more. But in *The Called of God* it appears under the title of 'Saul's Reprobation,' and the heading stares at us from the top of some twenty successive pages. This is the acme of ineptitude. It would be matched if Browning's great poem on the first King of Israel were republished under the title of 'Saul's Insanity.' Reprobation is the state of being a castaway from the favour of God. But the manifest desire of the preacher of this sermon is to compel the hearer (or reader) to repudiate any such conception of the tragically unhappy king. It was no reprobate, lost to virtue and grace, who inspired, one may venture to say, either David's Elegy or Davidson's Sermon. 'Surely this greedy earth, which has supped upon the blood of so many heroic hearts, never drank in nobler blood than this. . . . We leave his faults where we leave our own—at the feet of the true King of the Kingdom of God.'

The ripe fruits of Davidson's lifelong study of the Old Testament books are garnered in a series of articles written for various dictionaries and encyclopædias. 'Apocrypha,' 'Job,' and 'Proverbs' are to be found in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; 'Ecclesiastes' in

the *Encyclopædia Biblica* ; ‘ Angels,’ ‘ Covenant,’ ‘ Eschatology of the Old Testament,’ ‘ God,’ ‘ Hosea,’ ‘ Immanuel,’ ‘ Jeremiah,’ ‘ Prophecy and Prophets ’ in Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*. As there was an elective affinity between Davidson and such men as Hosea, Jeremiah, and the writer of Ecclesiastes, his interpretation of their writings is scarcely equalled anywhere in moral and spiritual insight, while the articles on ‘ God ’ and ‘ Prophecy,’ giving the cream of many lectures delivered at the New College, are recognised on all hands as among the most important contributions ever made to the study of the religion of Israel. ‘ I advise all my students,’ says Professor Kennedy of Edinburgh University, ‘ to beware of the posthumous *Old Testament Prophecy*, but to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the great article on that subject in Hastings’ *Dictionary*.’

CHAPTER XIV

THE HUMAN

IT is singular that among Professor Davidson's papers there is only one written prayer. He never read his prayers in classroom or pulpit, or in evening worship at home. In this he was a true Scotsman, for, as George Macdonald says, 'To the Scots mind it is a perplexity how prayer and reading should ever be one.'¹ The single written prayer was prepared for a wedding at which he assisted the officiating clergyman.² Simple as it is, it reveals the tender humanity of his lonely and wistful spirit. The second part of it runs thus : 'Gracious God, we give Thee thanks for all those human relationships which of Thy great goodness Thou hast ordained to exist among Thy children, for their mutual comfort and consolation in this life, and for their preparation for the life which is to come. In especial we give

¹ *Heather and Snow*, p. 101.

² It was the wedding of the Rev. G. R. S. Reid, now of Sydney, to Fanny Robertson, daughter of the minister of Pendleton.

Thee thanks for those most intimate relations of parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, which call out and nourish whatever is good and tender in our thoughts and affections, and teach us how through loving and serving one another to love and serve Thee, who Thyself art Love. And we beseech Thee to grant to all of us here present to be faithful in all the relations in which we are placed to one another, being kindly affectioned one to another, in honour preferring one another, and preserving in all things that meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God is of great price. And may the richest blessings rest upon Thy two servants about to be united in marriage; through their union may their earthly joys multiply, and through their serving of Thee together may they grow in grace. And may goodness and mercy follow them all the days of their life, and may they dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

I do not think that Professor Davidson ever officiated at a wedding. He was a probationer for two years, but for a licentiate without charge weddings as well as sacraments are *ultra vires*. Even when he was a Professor of Theology, some

of his friends were uncertain whether he could, *ex officio*, perform the rite of 'tying the knot.' After grey hairs were here and there upon him, he was much beloved by the family of Dr. Walter Smith. One of the daughters, his great favourite, who was about to be married, startled him at a dinner-table by looking across and asking, 'Dr. Davidson, could you marry me?' He blushed crimson, but quickly pulled himself together and said, 'Yes, it is in my power to perform the ceremony.'

After the fulfilment of two of his dreams—his appointment as Professor of Hebrew and his visit to the East—it is certain that he often thought of marriage as a possibility. Soon after his return from the Holy Land, he wrote to a happily married friend, complaining that something, he scarce knows what, 'perhaps the influence of malignant star,' keeps him 'to this day unwedded and solitary, surrounded by a boundless contiguity of dulness unbroken by acute sorrow and unrelieved by lively joy.' And in another very whimsical letter he says: 'It is curious that I dreamed the other night that I *was* married—to the wrong person; that is, I found when I began to talk to

her that she was not the person I intended to take or thought I was taking.' And then he proceeds to contrast her figure, the colour of her eyes, and even the shape of her nose, with the perfect stature and features of her who is his ideal.

In 1866 he had come to what Dante's first line calls '*il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*'—'the middle of our life's journey.' And in the mid-summer of that year he paid a visit of ten days to his college friend, Alexander Yule, then minister of a church in the heart of Perthshire,¹ a letter of whose records much of what follows. The family of one of the Lords of the Court of Session in Edinburgh—commonly called law-lords, or, irreverently, 'paper-lords'—were at that time renting a famous old house in the immediate neighbourhood, and regularly worshipped in Mr. Yule's church. They were a Celtic family, chivalrous and hospitable, and any friends visiting at the manse were sure to be invited to their home. There were three daughters, beautiful, sprightly, and accomplished, and in the second of them Davidson found his Beatrice, with whom he fell in love at first sight. But for a time he called

¹ Afterwards of Aberdeen and finally Melbourne.

himself a fool. Her family were, his common sense told him, higher than himself in the social scale, and that meant perhaps much more in mid-Victorian days than it does now. And they seemed to him to live in affluence, while he was only the poor colleague of an old Hebrew Professor. And, worst of all, that morbid fancy, of which he wrote to Taylor Innes, contrived, like the lying spirit in the mouth of the Prophets, to persuade him that the law-lord was indifferent, or even hostile, to him. Still, they twain afterwards met sometimes in Edinburgh, and thenceforth all thoughts, all passions, all delights were but the ministers of love. Being in Genoa in the spring-time of the following year, he bought an exquisite gem which he meant to offer with his love. Many things, however, and those the infinitely desirable, seem to minds like his too good to be true. Nobody understood better than he what the poet Spenser meant by calling his lady 'my dear dread'—an exquisitely truthful contradiction. Feeling how pure and exalted she, and how ignoble he, his spirit trembled at 'the flame of the Lord.' Love is not love which has not a holy fear at the heart of it. And the paternal

omens, alas, seemed still more unfavourable. And when he at length resolved to put his fate to the touch, 'to gain or lose it all,' it appeared to him that he was deliberately withheld from the light of his eyes. He was ushered into a dusty library, where he was put off by the great law-lord with dry legal talk, while in his heart there blazed a fire fierce enough to burn up all the law-books, law-courts, and law-lords in the universe. He went home in an immense despair. The quest was not for him. What was he, or what was his father's house, that he should entertain such a hope? He was not taken from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be a prince among his people and to wear the crown of love. His gem from Genoa was given—with what feelings!—to young Helen, who lost it. Verily, as the poet Schiller says, 'Herb ist des Lebens innerster Kern.' And what made the tragedy of the situation complete was that Beatrice, to whose intuition his face was an open book, was all the time no less in love with him than he with her. As to all which one may either exclaim, 'Oh, these mid-Victorians!' or else reverently say nothing.

Two years later—it was the winter day on

which Edinburgh committed the dust of the great and revered ' Rabbi ' to kindred dust—Davidson was introduced to an emeritus-minister who warmly invited him to his city home. This new friend had adult sons and a daughter, who was everything that a minister's daughter should be. And Davidson, who felt more than ever the need of that settlement in life which the old Hebrews called ' rest,' sought and won her hand. But from the first he was strangely troubled. He summoned to him the spirit of love and found himself mocked. He *had* loved, passionately and whole-heartedly, and, Heaven help him, he could never cease to love. And now the reproach of coldness in love, which he saw on the faces of all his friends, tortured him. ' I believe,' says his wise and cool-headed friend, from whom one may differ, ' he would have been happy if he had just gone on and said nothing. But in his strange conscientiousness he resolved to tell his fiancée, and did so, offering, however, to go on with the marriage if she chose. But to a woman of any spirit that was out of the question. The thing was broken off.' Thus his life fell in ruins about him. To still his fevered brain he fled to the fast-

nesses of the West Highlands. He did not dare to go near the sea. Hamlet? Perhaps, but rather Elijah. 'It is enough; take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'

When he returned to Edinburgh and tried to take up the tasks of life again, he needed a pavilion from the strife of tongues. He was ostracised for years by many of his old acquaintances, and even by some of his own colleagues. But Rainy, who knew all, was 'resolute in his defence.'¹ The conclusion of this Sordello story must be told in the tense language of the Australian friend, with only the change of a word. 'I know,' says this narrator, 'that Davidson could have had Beatrice after that, and I told him so on the very best authority. But no; he said, "As an honourable man, so long as another remains unmarried, I *must* do so too."'

Whether we praise or blame, that was a great day in his life. We cannot but ask why some other actor, or some *deus ex machina*, did not appear in the drama, to avert calamity and dry tears. Why the insoluble mystery of pain? That is the nature of all high tragedy. But the

¹ James Duguid.

sequel of love that never finds its earthly close is not blinding tears and streaming eyes. After some years quietly devoted to all good works, Beatrice left Edinburgh and went to spend her days with a brother in Canada. There she lived for thirty years, and there she died two summers after him who loved her and whom she loved. And eternity is only beginning.

Ten years later Davidson, now past fifty, had, Ruskin-like, a sweet and ardent affection for a lovely girl still in her teens. It shook him nearly as Ruskin was shaken, but he had accepted his destiny—'I have been, shall be, am alone.'

His friends got occasional glimpses of his solitary inner life. 'His reticence,' says Hugh Falconer, 'had about it an endearing suggestion of central and pathetic loneliness. Rothe says somewhere that our love is never perfect even towards God, until there is in it an element of *pity*. Perhaps Davidson won from young men a devotion all the intenser for a certain weakness in strength that softened his brilliant intellectual qualities. It is odd how often the older men who appeal most strongly to youth are solitaries, some of them with a romantic hinterland wherein

the course of true love did not run smooth. On occasion Davidson laid aside his reserve. An old friend told me how he confided to her his fears, especially a queer terror of the dark. He insisted that she should accompany him to evening service, as he could not bear the eerie feeling of walking through the wood at night. Another described to me how they were sitting alone in her drawing-room on a Sunday evening after he had preached, when he suddenly and tragically broke down. He walked up and down, like one distracted, wringing his hands and crying, "What shall I do?" It was a long time before his agitation subsided. No doubt that warm, sensitive, pathetic nature had often to curb itself lest it should be unmanned, and a vague feeling of something exquisite and child-like at the core of his shy solitary genius gave him a place all his own in our heart. Among our teachers there were not a few radiant sons of the morning, but there was only one Davidson.'

In the spring of 1890, when he was in his sixtieth year, he came to introduce me in St. Fergus. At the door of the manse, which looks from a windy height over the dunes to the sea, I chanced to

say to him, ' I 'm afraid I shall be rather lonely up here.' He rallied me. I had found my work, would make friends, had all my life before me. And then he added, in another tone, unutterably wistful, ' Ah, *you* don't know what loneliness is.' The mood passed in a moment, and we started for a four miles' walk, the singing larks above our heads making him as happy as little Pippa. The moods changed with the changing hours—

The slow sweet hours that bring us all things good,
The slow sad hours that bring us all things ill,
And all good things from evil.

Somewhere towards the end of the eighties he wrote to a friend in the heart of England : ' I am in the main a mill-horse, so accustomed to go a round, that I wonder where I am when not going it. Except this dull routine, I have no joys in the present and no hopes in the future. I have no wishes, no anticipations, look for no pleasures, and having no hopes, fear no disappointments. The last thirty years are all blank in my memory. But I remember a much earlier time when I was a little boy at school, and my mother used to walk in twenty miles to see me. I think of that time, and I learn that I still have tears.'

CHAPTER XV

THE SILENT

THE author of the *Life of Principal Rainy* was no doubt expressing the thought of many minds when he indicated a need for inquiry into the cause or causes of Professor Davidson's silence in the case of Robertson Smith. Why did he, 'to whom all the land would have listened as a master, and who had been Robertson Smith's master,' take no lead and utter no voice in public? Why was his vote for Smith always a silent vote? Rightly declining even to discuss the suggestion that Davidson was a coward, Dr. Simpson offers some other suggestions—the scholar's shrinking from the ecclesiastical arena, or a Hamlet-like irresolution, or an Ecclesiastes-like sense of the resultlessness of all struggle for knowledge, or a temperamental self-distrust and diffidence. These are not exactly high motives to action, or, as in this case, to inaction. Nor is one attracted by the picture of Davidson in either of two poses—'with

his fine head now sunk deep on his breast as though he were uncertain about duty or opinion, and now thrown up and poised a little to one side to hear, while the wistful smile, sharpening at times to the ironic, plays gently upon lips so firmly sealed.' This is the one page in the two volumes of Dr. Simpson's admirable biography which I have read with feelings of strong dissent. When he looked across at the master in the crowded Assembly, he completely failed to read the mind's construction in the face.

If Professor Davidson sensitively shrank from the ecclesiastical arena, he had much higher and worthier motives than any of those which Dr. Simpson has tentatively suggested. For one thing—though I lay little stress upon this—every wise man is his own physician before he is forty, and Davidson was forty-five when the great case began. It is something more than a law of self-preservation which bids every man regard his health as a sacred trust, and I suspect that the scholar whose hand involuntarily went to his left side on a Monday after he had preached, who had to consult Dr. Bell regarding the irregular action of his heart, and who in the end suddenly died

from cardiac failure, would not have fought long in the arena. Anybody who was present at that memorable meeting of the Edinburgh Presbytery in which he was impeached, and witnessed the pain which it cost him to make his one speech of one sentence, must know well that five years of that kind of thing would have shortened his days, and that even a little of it might have killed him outright. All the same, not a single person who knew Davidson would have suggested for a moment that the thought of his own health would have kept him silent on a great occasion in which there was a clear call to speak.

There can be no doubt that Davidson was temperamentally diffident. To his friends that was part of his charm. It is true that a character marked by diffidence is as sure to have its defects as one in which confidence predominates. But self-distrust, as well as self-assurance, has its very attractive side. I like to think of two great Scotsmen in the East. The one is 'Abdullah Effendi,' clad in Eastern garb, travelling in the neighbourhood of Mecca with only Arabic-speaking attendants, allaying all native suspicion by fluency of speech and brilliancy of argument.

The other is a ' Frank ' scarcely less proficient in the language, who uses his gift day after day in helping to translate the Holy Scriptures, and who, for the rest, moves about streets and bazaars observing everything, enjoying the pageant and understanding the talk, but saying nothing. Who would wish either of these two men to be other than what God and nature and education had made them ? They were trained from childhood in different schools. The one lived as a boy in a perpetual debating society, the members of which—parents, brothers, sisters, and boarders—stimulated one another to discuss everything above and beneath the sun, and which adjourned at night-fall only to meet again with new zest and fresh arguments next morning. The other was reared among men and women whose business in life was patient and faithful toil, who daily lifted up their eyes to the everlasting hills and listened to the eternal motion of the sea, and who, especially in matters of faith and duty, were swift to hear, slow to speak. I am not for a moment suggesting any invidious comparisons ; I am appreciating two different types. The one man had all the splendid qualities of the school of speech, the other all the

attractions of the school of silence. But if any critic surmises that temperamental diffidence kept Davidson silent when he ought to have spoken, again I reject the hypothesis. His diffidence cost him dear many a time, but I do not believe that in all his life he was ever silent when his duty to his Church and to God required him to speak.

The final suggestion is that Davidson sat silent through the long debates 'as if he were uncertain about duty or opinion.' Here we evidently come to questions of the utmost gravity. As to Davidson's opinion on the questions which were at issue, it is really absurd to suggest that there was any doubt in his own mind. Davidson, as a believing critic, had been the teacher of Robertson Smith, who was equally believing though more aggressively critical, and of his celebrated article in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* Black and Chrystal rightly observe: 'It is clear, although he does not say it in so many words, that the scholarly reviewer disbelieves in the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy; and his conclusion is . . . that the facts in the history of redemption are left entirely untouched by the

most advanced critical theories.’¹ A teacher who is himself to any extent uncertain about opinion is pretty sure to create a generation of doubters and waverers, but it is the unanimous verdict of Davidson’s students that he was himself so positive and constructive in his lectures and writings, that they left the New College established, strengthened, settled in their faith. There have been testimonies innumerable to that effect, not only from first-rate scholars like Elmslie and Skinner and Harper, but from a multitude of the rank and file. Here is what is said by two Indian missionaries.

‘ I remember well,’ writes Professor Monteith Macphail of Madras Christian College, ‘ how impressed I was in *The Theological*² by finding myself in a new world of living new ideas. The source of it all one soon discovered was A. B. D., and when in the second year we had his lectures I felt the Old Testament was a new book to me. One thing that struck me forcibly was the ludicrous nature of the idea that Davidson exerted “ an unsettling tendency,” to use the famous phrase of the

¹ *Life of William Robertson Smith*, p. 339.

² He means the New College Theological Society.

Robertson Smith case. He indeed gave us a new, and, as I believe, a true way of looking at Scripture, but he made me feel that it was a revelation of God in a way I had never grasped before. He was conservative of all that really mattered, and I am certain that, so far from unsettling, he confirmed the faith of many a young man.'

In 1897, when Dr. Davidson had been nominated as Moderator, Professor W. Meston, of the same Indian college, wrote thus: 'As an old student I am delighted that the position is to be yours, for the days in your class were an inspiration to me, as to how many others, and contact with yourself is something to be for ever grateful for. I can tell you this with all the greater confidence and pleasure, because here I have been able to put your teaching to a practical test, and I have thus found its inestimable value. You made the Old Testament a new book to me, and through that the New. And I find in my teaching of the Hindus and Mohammedans here that every day I am drawing on a store for which I am indebted to you.'

No, Davidson's fine head was not sunk upon his breast as if he were uncertain about opinion. Was it sunk, then, because he was 'doubtful about

duty' ? A thousand times no. He was silent, and gave a silent vote, in the great debates, because he believed that he was best serving God and his Church by being silent. He had, from the beginning of his career as a teacher, determined to pursue a certain course, to adopt a certain method, in the educating of his Church in the principles of historical criticism. Year after year he had seen his educational ideas verified and his methods justified by results. And when he found his brilliant pupil adopting a radically different method, which seemed to him clearly mistaken, he could not give him the active support which he would otherwise have rejoiced to give him. It was hard no doubt to be misjudged, as if he had failed in love and loyalty to his pupil and friend, leading a young pioneer into perilous tracts and then forsaking him. He knew that such accusations were groundless. His affection for Smith began in 1866, when the young scholar came up from Aberdeen trailing clouds of glory with him, and it never failed to the end. 'I remember,' writes James Duguid, 'the first time I ever heard of Smith. Davidson said to me that he had a little fellow in his class far ahead of any other

student he ever had in any of his classes. He started questions of his own, and he investigated them for himself in a way no other young man could have done. That conviction remained with Davidson through life.'

But as an educationist Davidson was a much greater man than Smith. He was probably the greatest Scottish teacher of last century. And when he saw his best pupil, himself now a teacher, seeking to force critical methods upon an unenlightened and unconvinced Church, attempting to convert a great Christian democracy with law, logic, libels, brilliant dialectic and splendid scorn, his instinct told him that all this was gravely wrong. He liked least of all the scorn—though many thought it splendid—which called the honest and earnest objectors to criticism the party of ignorance or stupidity (*Dummheit* was a word in frequent use), which habitually spoke of them collectively as 'the adversary' or 'the enemy,'¹ while it applied to individual opponents such terms as 'raw preacher,' 'worldly ecclesiastic,' 'Jesuit,' 'poltroon.' Davidson's most intimate friends know how all such language pained him, and more

¹ See *Life of W. R. Smith*, *passim*.

especially the language used regarding his great colleague. He often had on his own lips the words 'imperfect knowledge,'¹ but he always used the phrase with a profound humility on the one hand and a profound sympathy on the other. And to call such men as Alexander Duff of Calcutta, Hood Wilson of the Barclay, John Kelman of Leith—to take three names at random—the party of ignorance or stupidity, was to judge oneself. These were the Peter and James and John of the modern Church. It is true that Peter and James and John were called the party of ignorance—unlearned and ignorant men—but they have also become, and they will remain, the teachers of all mankind. Davidson knew that the things which united him to such Christians were a hundred times greater than those which divided him from them. And he loved to sit, and did sit all his life, at the feet of such men—'any godly man,' as he used to say in his downright way. He never allowed himself to forget that every Christian has received an education in the highest things which cannot be obtained in any school or university of secular science, but which is given to the

¹ See a beautiful passage in *A Scotch Student*, p. 46.

most illiterate who sit at the feet of Christ and learn of Him. He therefore constantly spoke of his opponents with admiration and respect. They were Christian men, Christian gentlemen. When Mr. Spurgeon's life closed, the *Modern Church*—a paper which died, I fear, of scorn—allowed itself to speak disrespectfully of the great preacher's piety. 'Ah,' said Davidson, when he heard of it, 'true piety is always such a rare and such a beautiful thing, that we should never think of it without admiration and thankfulness.'

As the educator of his Church—he knew perfectly well he was that—Davidson had certain canons which he never allowed himself to violate. A true teacher can and must bear gently with the ignorant and erring, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmities. He must open the Scriptures to those who are foolish and slow of heart to believe; and he must wait—following the great Example—if there are many things which his disciples cannot yet bear. His patience is the measure of his merit as a teacher. He can even—though this is a counsel of perfection—bear fools gladly. Still more, he can himself become a fool for Christ's sake, that others may be wise. And,

above all, he must remember that the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

‘I well remember,’ writes Professor Harry Kennedy, ‘the characteristic intonation of Davidson’s voice, so familiar to his students, as he remarked, “The one unpardonable sin for Smith was stupidity.”’ That was Smith’s limitation and misfortune. On one side of his nature he was—through no fault of his own—very imperfectly educated. As Franz Delitzsch said to Keith Falconer about him, ‘Der Verstand prädominiert.’ Davidson, on the other hand, had the immense advantage—like his Lord—of being sprung from the people, reared among them, and thus capable of entering into all their ways of thinking and profoundly sympathising with them. All the deepest divinity that he ever taught he learned from his mother. And when he became a great scholar, she sometimes—like the mother of Jesus—had difficulty in following him. When, for instance, he was selected as one of the Revisers of the Old Testament, his mother was utterly bewildered. ‘It’s terrible,’ said the dear saint, ‘to think o’ Andrew tamperin’ wi’ Holy Vrect.’ Clearly she belonged to the party of ignorance. But her son

did not overwhelm her with scorn. He smiled no doubt, but he talked to her in filial love, he took infinite pains to explain the facts to her, he opened her understanding to understand what needed to be done to the Scriptures, he dispelled her doubts and fears, until no one was so proud as she of his place in the Jerusalem Chamber and his service to the Word of God. And next to his mother he loved his Mother Church, and the one taught him how to educate the other, giving him instincts which never failed him. Thus while Smith kept saying *Il faut de l'audace* and such-like things,¹ Davidson knew well that though fighting with laws and libels and scorn might be magnificent—and in this instance was very magnificent—it was war, and the servant of the Lord need not fight with his brethren and his Mother Church. For he can educate them—a very different thing.

In an unpublished sermon, preached about the time of the Smith case, he gave expression to his deepest convictions thus : ‘ Truth, abstract truth, is a very precious thing. Much depends on it. Many sacrifices should be made for it. But Truth is not everything, nor is it the highest thing.

¹ *Life of W. R. Smith*, p. 386.

Love is greater—love in Christ Jesus. In most things the watchword is: principles not people—measures not men. Plato is my friend, but Truth is more my friend. In Christianity the motto is reversed. Men first—principles after. Truth is dear, but my brother is dearer. . . . That poor scruple which you esteem so lightly is acceptable unto God. A Christian's scruples are things of immeasurable greatness. To be in the Kingdom of God, to be Christ's, to have Him King and Lord of all our thoughts and feelings, gives to each one of these sentiments an incalculable worth, a transcendent value. . . . It is better in trivial matters to be wrong, if our opinion be the fruit of the free and joyful activity of our own mind, than to be right, if the opinion which we hold be one painfully dinned into us by some rigid disciplinarian. Beware of allowing your Christian individuality to be squeezed out of you by the pressure of general opinion calling itself culture and liberality. You fear to be priest-ridden. I will warn you whom also to fear—fear those intolerant bigots who lay claim to be illuminated and would crush out by their scorn every peculiarity of Christian character and sentiment.'

Next to Robertson Smith the most interesting young man in the Free Church towards the end of last century was Henry Drummond. He too had to conquer the Free Church, and he did it in the right way. His *Ascent of Man* was, from a confessional point of view, ten times more heterodox than anything that Robertson Smith ever wrote. But he did not demand a libel, nor fight his Church with logic and law. Imagine him coming to the General Assembly and trying to convince the fathers and brethren that his *Ascent of Man* was scriptural and orthodox—trying, that is, to convert his Church to Darwinism. Beyond a doubt he would have been condemned like a new Galileo. His Church could not understand his science, which she will take more than a century to assimilate. But she understood his amazing Oddfellows' Hall revival meetings ; she understood his apostolic Holiday Missions ; she understood the most attractive character moulded by Christianity in modern times. And she grappled him to her soul with hooks of steel.

Robertson Smith was as true a Christian as Henry Drummond, and of course an infinitely finer scholar. He was so evangelical in his faith

that Horatius Bonar, who heard him preach, ungenerously questioned his sincerity. That, needless to say, was absurd. Smith was true as steel—incapable, if ever man was, of saying a word beyond what he believed and felt. But he missed an immense privilege which was the determining factor in Drummond's career. With his astonishing talents he was perhaps the rarest gift ever bestowed upon the Free Church. But his Church did not know how to use him. She made him a great scholar—in pure scholarship the greatest she ever had. But she did not make him an evangelist. She put him into a Chair of Theology before she had completed his education. She gave him the care of students before she had given him a cure of souls. You say that he ought to have claimed his right—he ought to have said, 'I refuse to teach students of Divinity until I have learned experimental theology by seven years' evangelism.' I agree ; but he was obeying his Church, dutifully accepting her call. She, with the best intentions, did him a cruel wrong at the beginning of his ministry, and it led to the tragic wrong at the end.

During the two years which preceded the

Robertson Smith case, an astonishing movement took place in Great Britain and Ireland which was of immense interest and importance for every true theologian. This was the Religious Revival of which the visit of Mr. Moody was the occasion. With the exception of that renewed enthusiasm for Biblical studies of which Professor Davidson was the pioneer, the movement in question did more than anything else to put new life into the Theological Halls of Scotland, as well as to quicken the pulse of all the Churches. But of that immensely important movement the *Life of Robertson Smith*, which gives 273 pages to the First Case, the First Libel, the Amended Libel, the Short Libel and the Second Case, is utterly unconscious. It might as well never have occurred. Not a word is said of the tremendous campaign which filled the Schools of the Prophets and the Settlements of Social Service. Criticism is thus—quite unintentionally, but none the less really—separated from life, theology from religion, science from faith.

After all these years I believe that the Free Church—now the United Free—has begun to understand Davidson's silence, and to bless him

for it. She now realises that in the whole Critical Movement he saw things in their true proportions. He never put Historical Criticism first. To him it was only the handmaid of religion. There had been myriads of true Christians before Criticism was heard of, and there will be myriads more when Criticism is no startling novelty, but the merest educational commonplace. And while he knew that he was rendering a great service to the Word of God by introducing more accurate and scientific methods of interpretation, he never forgot that the real and abiding value of the Bible lies in its message, or that its inspiration is first and best demonstrated by its immemorial saving power in the lives of men. 'I remember,' writes Alexander Yule, 'his being at Cargill at a time when there was a deep religious interest abroad, and that, when he came in from a meeting where he had spoken, and at which there were earnest enquirers, he took up the big Bible which we used at family worship, and said, as the tears came down his cheeks, "Yes, it's my mother's plain English Bible that does it."'

'I fancy,' writes Professor Denney, 'Davidson thought Smith was forcing the pace needlessly,

and not without prejudice to the life and peace of the Church. From the Montaigne point of view—and something in him always reminds me of Montaigne—and also from the point of view exactly opposite, say that of the Fourth Evangelist, the whole Robertson Smith uproar was much ado about nothing. When Carnegie Simpson and Sutherland Black, in their *Lives* of Rainy and Robertson Smith, tried to revive it as recently they did, it proved to be dead beyond recall. Nobody would read it but those who had gone through it, and hardly even they. It recalls almost too painfully Virgil and his bees :

Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta
Pulveris exigui jactu compressa quiescunt.'

Certamina tanta! Yes, but the conflicts of men like Paul and Barnabas, Cunningham and Candlish, Rainy and Robertson Smith, are only for a moment where a thousand years are as one day. The dry official *Life* of Candlish becomes here and there human—intensely so where we read what he said in his St. George's pulpit on the Sunday after the death of Cunningham: 'I thank the Giver of all good, the Healer of all breaches, the Author of peace, and the Lover of

concord for this great mercy—that not yesterday, but some years ago, the darkest cloud that ever gathered over my happiness here below, in so far as that lay in human friendship, passed quite away, and we were to one another as we were before.’ Smith died too soon for anything similar to that being read in his *Life*. But if he were living to-day—and in the even tenor of a scholar’s life he might now be nearing his threescore and ten—his would probably be the most honoured name in all Scotland. Before he died, at the age of forty-seven, I was among those who heard his last lecture,¹ in which he gave his testimony as a Christian believer. After contrasting the religion of Israel with all the other Semitic religions, he quietly concluded : ‘ The burden of explaining this contrast does not lie with me. It lies with those who are compelled by false Philosophy of Revelation to see in the Old Testament nothing more than the highest point of the general religious tendency of Semitic religion. That is not the view which that study commends to me.’

That a man with such a faith was lost to his

¹ At Marischal College, Aberdeen. His third course of Burnett Lectures was never published.

Church was of course a tragedy. But the tragedies of lives like Davidson's and Smith's are compacted out of the noblest elements of Scottish faith and character. Dante, greatly daring, would bid us change 'tragedies' into 'divine comedies.' In the light of eternity the joys of life are always far greater than the sorrows. It was Davidson who won Smith to Semitic studies, and how much it meant to the religious life of Scotland that both her greatest scholars remained absolutely true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home ! When Smith had made a great and honoured name for himself in Cambridge—when he was happy again, and even rich as scholars count riches—he told his friend Dr. Harper that he would give up everything without a moment's hesitation to get back to his work of teaching in the Free Church. And Dr. Lindsay has related that in the days before he died, his mind reverted several times to those unfinished lectures, and always with one dominant idea—he longed to be able 'to complete his argument.' His argument, remember, for a distinctive Hebrew and Christian revelation. If there be anything in Scaliger or Casaubon to equal that, I do not know it.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLAYER

It was well that the scholar could play as well as work ; well that he understood many things besides Daghesh and the Moabite Stone and the Higher Criticism ; well that he was a many-sided human being. He was so constituted as to be sensitive to the slightest changes of climate, food and drink. After middle life he suffered sometimes from stone, and often from that common plague of studious men, an irritable mucous membrane. His highly nervous organisation made his feelings acute, and his active brain needed frequent repose. And in truth it never was any great hardship for him to quit his study. He used to say, without meaning to be taken very seriously, that writing articles was work for convicts. Though he scorned delights and lived laborious days, preparing and reading lectures, writing books of his own and reviewing those of others, he was first and foremost a child of

Nature. He loved his College and lived for it, but he was as happy as any of his students when the last lectures of the session were delivered and the exit examinations were over. There were no texts that made a stronger appeal to him than 'Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun,' and 'For, lo, the winter is passed, the rain is over and gone, the time of the singing of birds is come.' He had been a mathematician and physicist in his youth, but he never pursued his scientific studies very far. The books which helped him to understand the world around him were those of the poets, the Hebrew poets first of all, and, though he never to my knowledge wrote a line of poetry, he was instinct with poetic feeling, Nature speaking to him as truly as she did to Wordsworth.

The hills he always loved best were the Cairngorms, the range whose snow-white, heaven-touching peaks drew his eyes in childhood and made him a dreamer. They lost none of their mysterious charm upon nearer view, and in the sixties he returned to them year after year. He became familiar with the frowning glories of dark Lochnagar, and he had a merry tale to tell of out-

witting the gillies on the flanks of Ben Macdhui, and a woeful one of a sportive wind which blew his spectacles clean away on the summit. Later on, he seemed to seek fresh fields and pastures new nearly every year. Tayside and Speyside knew him as well as Deeside ; he enjoyed pleasant sojourns in Arran, the Isle of Man, and one at least in Ireland ; and, like Waring, he might turn up mysteriously at Naples on the Mediterranean, Greifswald on the Baltic, or Stavanger on the North Sea. Scottish lochs, Norwegian fiords, Alpine snowfields, seemed to have equal attractions for him. A blue sky, a wind on the heath, a scent of birch or pine, made him happy anywhere. It was characteristic of him, however, that the human scene, with the chance of new friendships, always formed a chief part of the pleasure of travel. At Greifswald he struck up an intimate acquaintance with a Russian scholar, Baron Victor Rosen, whom he invited to Scotland and took on a tour through the Highlands. From Aix-les-Bains, where he acted as chaplain one summer—beginning with a congregation of six, as it was early in the season—he sent home the most amusing letters regarding the people he met.

Another summer he officiated for a month at Lucerne, where he enjoyed the ascent of Pilatus, and sat on a terrace one Sunday evening listening to the roar of distant thunder, while discussing with a friend—Lewis Davidson of Mayfield—the deep things of theology.

How he received strangers, and sometimes made new friends, may be indicated by two little reminiscences. ‘A hot summer day at Brodick in Arran, forty years ago,’ writes Hugh Falconer, ‘still shines for me, as then and there I first met A. B. Davidson. I vividly remember his flash of interest, his keen glance through his spectacles, and amused smile when the leader of our little expedition, a former student of his, told him of our exploits in walking round the island and climbing Cir Vohr; and the narrator of our adventures afterwards bade us congratulate ourselves, as this quiet genial man, in straw hat and spectacles, to whom we had been introduced, was out of sight the finest Biblical scholar in broad Scotland.’ In a Swiss hotel, though in holiday garb, he was recognised by some gentleman who, being asked to say grace the same evening at dinner, protested that he would rather Dr.

Davidson did so. 'I can see my uncle,' writes Mr. Alex. Davidson, 'raising his head so as to look his assailant straight through his spectacles, flushing, and after a moment's hesitation quietly performing the office of asking a blessing. The sequel came after dinner, when my uncle walked up to the unknown one and said, "You had the advantage of me, sir." It was a mild rebuke for the intrusion on his privacy, but I understand that it was the beginning of a friendship.'

It was while he was at Aix-les-Bains, in Savoy, that he and his friend, James Innes of Panbride, who had joined him for a Swiss tour, nearly perished in the attempt to cross to Chamounix. 'You may be glad to get this letter from me,' he wrote home to Helen. 'We had a fearful time. We got into a wilderness of snow without guide or human being near us. The mountain we meant to cross was over 10,000 feet high, but it was too early in the season and the snow came up to our waists. Innes gave in entirely; he could not go on, but lay down every few steps he took. The snow was so deep that it was up to the eaves of the houses where the shepherds live in summer, and Innes lay down on the *roof* of one of these houses

and fell asleep, while I sat shivering in the snow. I made him drink some brandy and pluck up courage. On the top of the mountain we had a dreadful thunder-storm, which sometimes was below us, and sometimes seemed quite beside us, and then the mist came on. I looked on myself as going to be a victim to my own rashness. But happily the way down the hill was marked by stakes, and we kept these in view and got down all safe.'

He never was so incautious a second time, though he did some more climbing. In spite of the danger, he evidently felt it was worth while to go up and see the new-fallen snow in its immaculate purity, and in interpreting the familiar words of the 51st Psalm, 'Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow,' he says : 'Here one hardly ever sees snow in its purity ; but among the mountains, up among the Alps or on the fields of Norway, one comes upon drifts of stainless snow. Its whiteness is dazzling ; its beauty is beyond the mind's conception. I have wondered that the Creator scatters with so profuse a hand so much that is of matchless beauty in regions where there is no human eye to behold it, where it has lain for many

ages unseen. But there are other eyes besides man's to behold it ; there is God's own eye. And He is, as it were, careless should none else discover the riches of His glory.' ¹

A holiday chaplaincy at home was quite as much to his mind as one abroad. At Tarbet he acted as *locum tenens* for two summer months, occupying the manse and preaching on Sunday, watching the outgoings of the morning and evening on loch and ben, while making friends with natives and sojourners alike. Professor Milroy of Belfast, who was staying there with his parents as a boy, has the pleasantest memories of intercourse with him, and the present minister of Tarbet writes : ' Naturally, a man of Davidson's shyness did not visit much except in cases of illness. But the testimony of every one who can recall his residence here is emphatic about the exceeding kindliness of the relations between him and the congregation, and the enjoyment of his Sunday services. One of my elders, who has spent all his life here, has said with quite a singular affectionateness in his tone, " I was *awfully* fond of his preaching." '

Having a great belief in the educative power

¹ *Waiting upon God*, p. 60.

of travel, he was always giving advice like the following to students who had done well in his classes : ' A stay abroad would, I should think, be the best thing for you. If you were to go abroad, it would really matter little whether you went to Berlin or Göttingen. . . . I am afraid my prejudices in favour of going abroad for a short time are so strong that I may be in the habit of always giving advice in that direction. I think, however, that you are one who would greatly enjoy and profit by a short time abroad, and as you are young you can well afford the time.' ¹ Such advice regarding German universities, alas, is not likely to be given again in our time. In future Paris or Rome, Harvard or Yale, will be substituted for Berlin and Göttingen.

One of the chief pleasures of travel for Professor Davidson was that of listening to foreign languages and — much less frequently — speaking them. He had a very acute sense of hearing, and a curious way of suddenly raising his head, turning it a little to the side, and darting a keen glance through his spectacles, whenever he heard any

¹ Letter to Mr. C. Hutchison, Hebrew tutor in the New College, now minister of Culsalmond.

surprising sound, it might be a mere whisper. A tiny child, who noticed this habit, said of him, 'He cocks his head like a birdie,' and 'Birdie' became the Professor's name in her family. His fine ear, combined with his verbal memory—which naturally was not so good for new words after he was past fifty—made him the excellent linguist he was. As far as languages went, he was almost equally at home in Leiden, Göttingen, Paris, and Rome, taking up the morning newspaper in any of these cities and reading it like a native. Not that he cared for all the languages alike, or spoke them with equal fluency. Indeed, he usually did not speak them at all, and his traveling companion Taylor Innes once said to him, 'Davidson, I never knew any man who could *be silent* in so many languages as you.' He read German perfectly, and Dutch quite well, but he did not greatly love either of them, chiefly I think on account of the guttural sounds, and it was difficult to persuade him to talk in them. 'In the early eighties,' writes Norman Macfarlane, 'there was a German club of University and New College men, who were most anxious to get Davidson to address them in German. Application after application

failed. He said he could not do it. Pressure at length prevailed, and there was universal delight over what he said, and *how* he said it.'

He read French with ease, but had difficulty in speaking it, chiefly, no doubt, on account of the accent. From Aix-les-Bains he wrote : ' I begin to speak French a little. I never spoke it well. I can do German much better and even Italian. But French is by far the easiest of them all.' Of all modern languages, Italian was the one he loved best after his own, and the only foreign one he really liked to speak. The liquid words were music to his ears, and he would repeat them over and over again, returning to them like a honey-bee to a flower. When a beggar at the door of a church in Florence or Naples made her appeal to him as a *poveraccia*, he was completely at her mercy. A word like that would not only draw silver from the purse of a very generous Scotsman, but tears from the eyes of Pluto. And I remember how he beamed with pleasure as he recalled how some Florentine citizen complimented him upon speaking quite like an Italian. To be under Italian skies, and to speak for a little while the language of Dante—*la lingua Italiana in bocca Toscana*—

that was an ideal holiday, though of course there never was anything quite to equal the Doric of Deeside and the purple hills of Braemar.

The hills around Edinburgh, however, were scarcely less dear to him. 'In his later years,' writes Dr. Harper, 'it was almost amusing to see how inevitably in his afternoon walks he turned towards the Braids. During one winter after my student days I often accompanied him, and it was plain how the heights exhilarated him, and how he enjoyed the long sweeps of view which they afforded him. Yet he very rarely stopped to admire, or to give expression to his delight. But somehow, in such circumstances he found it easier, I think, to talk on the subjects he was absorbed in. At that time he was engaged in writing his book on Hebrew Syntax, and he sometimes embarrassed me immeasurably by suddenly posing me with a question as to the significance of some Hebrew idiom which I had never given a moment's consideration to. Yet though these things were in the back of his mind, he always was enjoying the motion through the keen air and the beauty of the hills. Once, I remember, when the talk turned on the strange power of the scenery in the

Bernese Oberland, he told me with the deepest understanding and appreciation the story of an old Scottish minister whose name he mentioned, who, when he had toiled up from Interlaken and came for the first time in full view of the Jungfrau, was so overwhelmed that he burst into tears.'

Writing to Helen from Rome in April 1888, he says : ' This is the most delightful place in the world. I recall the Latin authors I used to read as a boy, and see all the places and objects still extant, though most of them in ruins, which I used to read of long ago. Taylor Innes and Thompson of the Free West Church in Aberdeen are with me. The latter is great on art and architecture, and I learn something from him. . . . There is a curious leaning tower at Pisa. I went to the top of it, and had the sensation that it was going to coup.¹ I felt very nervous and light in the head at the top, as the place was only partially protected. My head is already stronger. I went to the top of the Coliseum yesterday, and the view down did not make me feel particularly queer at all. Pisa is near Florence, where the Queen is just now. I do not think she knew that

¹ *Anglice*, overturn.

I was so near her. I was glad to get away before she heard of me, being afraid she might wish to have me stay beside her longer than it would have been convenient for me to do at present. Siena, where I spent Sunday, is a delightful old place, of which St. Catherine is the great saint. You remember St. Catherine's Place in the Sciennes—the last word is a corruption of the Italian word. Old Rome is now mainly ruins, but it has most interest for me—the Capitol, the Forum, the Palaces of the Caesars on the Palatine Hill, the Coliseum, and the hundred other things familiar in Latin writers. St. Peter's is a gigantic place; everything about it is so large that the whole does not look nearly so large as it really is. The most amusing thing about the inside is the statue of St. Peter, whose toe,' etc.

As the subject of this chapter is the Professor at play, I shall say a little about his diversions at home, and conclude with a few words regarding his special hobby of golf. On the former subject I cannot do better than quote from the simple but luminous notes of the niece to whom he was as a father. She says: 'Uncle was very fond of music. He liked simple music best, but he went

to the good concerts, and took me to hear Hallé and Neruda. He also went to the Reid Concert. He liked to hear my school friends play, and when they were with me in the evenings he always came into the drawing-room if he heard the piano. I do not think he cared much for classical music, but he had a good ear. I never knew him go to the theatre in Edinburgh, but he told me that he had gone in Naples or Genoa. He liked good pictures, and went to the Scottish Academy every year. He seemed to love landscape . . . He often read to me in the afternoons, before he began his evening work. He must have read a great deal of poetry. He loved Shakespeare, Tennyson, and many others. I remember his reading *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. He was fond of ballads, and Thackeray's, which are very pathetic as well as humorous, he read to me before I understood them. He liked parts of Burns—*Tam o' Shanter* I think he knew by heart. He used to speak of the Alexanders of Aberdeen, and he read *Johnny Gibb o' Gushetnuik* with great gusto to me. I did not like it at first. He was very fond of Hood's wit and humour, and read him to me till I knew him too. I do not think he cared for Charlotte

Brontë—he said women often liked morbid things. He liked healthy humour. He was fond of Scottish proverbs and often used them, and they come so pat to me now. He loved Arabic poetry and read it aloud to me, so that I used to know some, like a parrot. He was fond of reading the *Arabian Nights*, and had both Lane's and Palgrave's editions.

‘ He always took me walks on Saturdays round Arthur's Seat, and, after I returned in 1900, round the Braids. He was enchanted with the birds singing. When a lark sang he looked up and said, “You darling !” He had a great horror of cruelty to animals. Women wearing birds in their hats he did not like. He had a very keen sense of humour, liked good company, and was very tolerant of people's indiscretions, but from the really bad he seemed to recoil by instinct, and he never spoke of them. He was often blamed for liking and tolerating people whom others thought not up to the mark. He seemed to me a good judge of character.

‘ He was of a very happy nature, but a certain melancholy ran through it. He told me he often had a great desire to cry, when he looked at Nature

and the hills. But I do not recall any fits of weeping. As you know, he had a very tender nature, combined with great firmness and power. He was full of quips and quotations. Walking down the Mound on Sunday mornings we often met a young lady, of whom he would say—it seemed to me as if he were speaking to himself :

For as to fairies, that will flit
To make the greensward fresh,
I hold them exquisitely knit,
But far too spare of flesh.

He enjoyed the visits of old students very much. I recall Elmslie, Robertson Smith, Barbour, Sorley, Patrick, Harper, Peter Thompson, Ewing who went to Australia and died. They were all favourite students. He had a great admiration for Taylor Innes, and always said he ought to have come more to the front. I remember Professor Knight coming to stay for week-ends about 1870, and also Professor Crombie. Uncle was very hospitable, and used to have many clergymen staying with him for week-ends and at Assembly times. Thus I met a great many people, whom I am sorry to say I did not know the value of having met.

‘I am not sure of uncle’s politics. He was an enthusiastic admirer of Lord Beaconsfield. I take it he must have been a Unionist. I know he admired Balfour.

‘I have told enough to show you what a simple, lovable nature he had. I never thought of his great learning of course, but of his great kindness to me, and the love I had to him from the time I was a child. I live on those days. He said little about religion, but I felt all my life that his was the simple faith that I had learned from childhood. He always said our Lord was very human.’

Interesting as Helen’s account of her uncle’s diversions among books is, it naturally leaves some lacunæ. He never professed a critical knowledge of English literature, still less of foreign literatures, and he did not regard it as a duty to read the standard authors. He studied what he most affected. ‘If you asked him,’ says Claudius Clear, ‘what he had been reading lately he would say, I have been enjoying Horace very much, or give some answer equally tantalising.’ George Fairweather asked him, ‘What are you reading at present, Dr. Davidson?’ ‘Sir Walter Scott;

and I am not quite sure at times that I don't prefer him to my Bible.' On the other hand, he was never slow to confess his complete ignorance of writers about whom others might be enthusiastic. One of his students walked home with him from a reception, and finding him not conversationally inclined that evening, scrambled in his own mind for a topic. At last he pitched upon one, and said, 'I have been reading Emerson lately.' 'Oh!' said the Professor, and there was a long silence. The youth thought to himself, 'Evidently he considers it somewhat late in the day to begin reading Emerson,' and said aloud, 'I'm ashamed to say I never read him before.' 'Are you ashamed?' was the answer, 'I never read a word of him in my life.' Nor did he much admire Emerson's great Scottish friend. 'The words of Carlyle might be quoted,' he says in his second *Job*, 'were it not that this writer's raptures are so often founded on intellectual mistakes and imperfect appreciation of facts, and are therefore, like all ideal raptures, only nauseous.' On one occasion the graphic description of the battle of Dunbar in Carlyle's *Cromwell* was mentioned to him. He answered with approval, but remarked,

‘He calls Belhaven a fishy village. It is not a fishy village.’ He liked the best of Trollope’s books, but did not get on with Meredith. He read Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and began the second reading, at one sitting. One evening his partner at a dinner-table started conversation by asking what he thought of *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. He took a spoonful of soup, and said, ‘Sometimes I think there is nothing in it’; a second spoonful, and said, ‘Sometimes I think there is something in it’; a third spoonful, and said, ‘I feel sure that if there is anything in it, it is something bad.’¹ He encouraged Mr. Crockett in his literary efforts, and he greatly enjoyed the humour of Ian Maclaren.

Thirty or forty years ago there were not many golf courses in the east or west of Scotland on which Professor Davidson had not occasionally played, and to places like Elie, Carnoustie, and North Berwick he returned time after time. Of his golf Mr. R. R. Simpson gives this account: ‘Professor Davidson could not only teach Hebrew to perfection, but he could play golf well. Although

¹ Mrs. Harper (*née* Barbara Rainy) is responsible for this.

not a brilliant, he was a steady player. He was a charming partner, and, what is more rare, a generous opponent. His characteristic humility was seen even on the golf course. He had a very modest estimate of his golfing powers, and at the outset of a game he almost invariably expressed distrust in himself, especially in a foursome, in case his partner should be disappointed with his play. The Professor did not drive a long ball, but if not far his drive was always sure. There was little slicing or topping with him. He excelled in his approach shots. His golfing friends will always remember his firm, calm stand, the swift glance at the flag on the green, his well-judged stroke, generally followed by good results. On the green itself he was often very deadly with his putts, and it was a treat to see the quiet smile of satisfaction which irradiated his face when he holed out from some distance.

‘ The Professor took an interest in the golfing prowess of his pupils, as he did in their success in the pulpit or the press, but he was occasionally somewhat caustic in his criticism of their play. When playing a single with me at Grantown, it happened that the couple following us were two

of his old pupils, for whom he had a great regard. He looked round occasionally to see how they were getting on. After one of his surveys he quietly remarked, "I never saw lads like these for losing their ba-als, and it isn't on account of the distance they hit them."

Dr. Fairweather, who frequently enjoyed a game with him, gives me some stories. 'One day he and I were partners in a foursome, and one of our opponents sent his ball into a bad bunker, whereupon the Professor said, "Now one can understand the Psalmist's words, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it!"

'At Gullane one day his own ball landed in a pretty bad hole, and when he had got the iron and was looking at the ball, he said to his caddie, "Boy, is this the bottomless pit?" "No, sir, it's a rabbit's hole."

'At North Berwick there is—or was in the old course—a short hole where you should drive the ball to the green. Davidson made an excellent drive, and when we reached the green he wanted his putter, but his caddie had disappeared. The boy's name was Adam, and looking all round the Professor said, "Adam, where art thou?" After

a minute or two Adam appeared round the corner of a wood munching a turnip. "Ah," said Davidson, "Adam has fallen!"

While he greatly enjoyed the Royal Game, which did more than anything else to keep him fit, he looked with mixed feelings upon the strange being—quite extinct since the War began—for whom golf was the be-all and end-all of life. 'At the ninth hole of any course,' says Dr. Fairweather, 'we always sat down to smoke a cigarette. On one of these occasions a great swell came along playing his ball, and after surveying him Davidson said, "You know, I never see one of these gorgeous gentlemen in knickerbockers without thinking what the Scriptures say about the Israelites—they eat, they drink, and they rise up to play."'

CHAPTER XVII

THE SCHOLAR

Two attempts were made to transfer Professor Davidson from the New College to other spheres of labour, the one when he was thirty-six, the other when he was sixty-three. In the beginning of 1868 it became known that he had been requested to allow himself to be nominated for the Chair of Theology and Church History in the College of the English Presbyterian Church at Queen's Square, London. Letters which he received from leading men in that Church made it evident that if he consented to stand, he would certainly be appointed. But one hundred and seven students in the New College—among them T. N. Lindsay, W. R. Smith, J. S. Black, A. Miller, James Iverach—immediately and urgently petitioned him not to listen to the voice of strangers—that was not how they put it, but what they meant. And in truth he needed little moral suasion. He was once invited by Halliday

Douglas—a Lycidas still greatly mourned—when the latter was minister of St. Columba's Church, Cambridge, to come and preach to his congregation, in which there were always a good many college dons. The most memorable sentence in the reply was, 'I know not the manner of the God of the land.' One can scarcely imagine Davidson teaching 'furth of Scotland,' and in any case it would have been very hard for him to specialise in a new and immense field of study like Church History. But probably the Church historian of the future will not hesitate to say that the two men who did most to *make* Church history in Scotland in the end of the nineteenth century were Robert Rainy and Andrew Davidson.

In 1894 the Chair of Hebrew and Semitic Languages in the University of Edinburgh was rendered vacant through the lamented death of Professor Dobie, whose promising career was ended by a railway disaster. Professor Flint then approached Dr. Davidson, and asked him whether, in the event of the Crown making him an offer of the vacant Chair, he would accept it, and after due consideration Davidson

replied in the affirmative.¹ I think he probably had the idea that the New College and University classes might be taught together, as the Free Church and United Presbyterian classes had been one winter with happy results. That would doubtless have been an admirable arrangement in the eyes of all the students. But manifestly there were difficulties. The *Entente Cordiale* between the different Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, which is now happily nearing a corporate union, was in those days only a prophetic hope and devout dream. And one feels certain that neither Professor Davidson himself nor his Church could have brooked the idea of his transference to the University, once it was seen to involve the necessity of appointing a successor to him at the New College. So the negotiations fell through, and Dr. Archibald R. S. Kennedy was transferred from Aberdeen to the position which he has held with so much distinction for over twenty years.

At the same time the proposal was a testimony not only to Davidson's long unquestioned primacy among Scottish Semitic scholars, but to the place

¹ My informant for this is Professor Curtis, who had it from Dr. Flint.

which he had won in the affections of all the Churches. It had become apparent that though he was a son of the Disruption, who always gratefully acknowledged that his well-springs were in the Free Church, he belonged to every branch of the Christian Church, and in his generation faithfully served them all. A writer in the *Academy* referred with good reason to 'his extraordinary detachment, one might even say isolation.' A stranger might read all his books and articles, not only without discovering to which branch of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland he belonged, but without being able to affirm that he was not a Congregationalist, a Wesleyan, or an Anglican.

He therefore esteemed alike the work of every true scholar of every Church. Brief extracts from a few letters will suffice to prove this, if proof be needed. Emeritus-Professor James Robertson, of Glasgow University, writes : 'I am glad to pick up a link of connection with Dr. Davidson, for whom I had a very great admiration. I had pretty close correspondence with him when I was seeing Müller's Syntax through the press ; he read the proofs very carefully, and I think I have preserved all his letters.' And

Professor W. B. Stevenson, Dr. Robertson's successor, wrote in 1902 : ' I shall always cherish the memory of Professor Davidson's kind personal interest in my studies and work. I mention this only because it must have been also the experience of hundreds besides.'

Dr. G. A. Cooke, Regius Professor of Hebrew in Oxford—Dr. Driver's successor—who met Dr. Davidson sometimes in Edinburgh, and had very interesting talks with him, writes : ' He impressed me as being one of those really great scholars who, whatever their circle may be, rise above all the divisions which separate men and churches, and breathe a larger air. I felt that he belonged to the small group of those who know, with a large experience of life and study behind him. . . . He talked very freely and with generous encouragement to a junior like myself ; he was good enough to treat me as a colleague or fellow-student ; I was touched and humiliated !'

And Professor Witton Davies, of the University College of North Wales, who met Dr. Davidson in Lucerne in 1894, and greatly enjoyed his preaching and talk, says : ' In my diary of the time I state that he was almost excessively generous in his

estimate of other scholars. He used particularly strong language in praising his former students—those of course who had risen to eminence. But he appeared to me to have a bad word for no one, which is the very opposite attitude to that of the ordinary German professor, who is jealous of every other professor in his own department in his own country. I asked him if he knew Dr. Samuel Davidson, the author of the *Introduction to the Old Testament* and other books. He answered, No, and that he had constantly to remind his friends that he was not the great Dr. Davidson, but only A. B. Davidson of the New College, Edinburgh.'

Lest any one should accept this too modest self-estimate, I must quote the following words in reference to a group of his most famous contemporaries. 'It is not too much to say that at the time his *Job* was published Davidson was the one scientific Hebraist of the first rank in Great Britain. True, controversies were going on. Bunsen, Colenso, Samuel Davidson, Pusey, Rowland Williams, and others were busy. Not one of them really counts in these days. It is not necessary or even advisable for

the student of the Higher Criticism to spend time on their work. Davidson was in another class, and his book stands.' ¹

Another of his services to the cause of sacred learning brought him into fellowship with all the finest British Hebraists. It is generally admitted that the Revision of the Old Testament is a more satisfying achievement than that of the New, and every time we read a few pages of it we are unconscious debtors to scholars like him. It was a very quiet piece of work, lasting fourteen years (1870-1884), with sederunts on seven hundred and ninety-two days, and it took him from Edinburgh to London so many times that he lost count. With regard to his personal share in the gigantic task, every reader will be grateful for the following testimony from Professor A. H. Sayce, the distinguished Assyriologist: 'As a member of the Old Testament Revision Committee, he was slow to speak or pronounce a definite opinion upon a disputed point, but when he did so it was accepted on all sides as the final pronouncement of mature scholarship. Robertson Smith and myself were the representatives of what may be called

¹ Sir W. R. Nicoll.

the Radical party among the Revisionists,¹ until we were reinforced later on by Cheyne and Driver, and we sometimes thought that Dr. Davidson, as he was usually called, was inclined to be too cautious and not sufficiently outspoken upon our side. Unless the evidence was quite clear upon one side or the other, he would not commit himself to a dogmatic opinion. . . . But on matters of Hebrew scholarship we all accepted his conclusions, whenever he gave them, without hesitation ; if he considered that an Old Testament passage admitted of only such and such a translation, there was no more to be said.'

In the late nineties Davidson and Sayce met one another at Hetland, the Dumfriesshire home of Mrs. Miller Morrison, the daughter-in-law of Hugh Miller. In her youth she had persuaded Professor Davidson to teach Hebrew to a class consisting of herself and a dozen other young Edinburgh ladies. Thereafter Davidson was her lifelong friend, and he frequently visited her at Hetland. When she was writing her poem 'The

¹ 'We were regarded as the firebrands of the company,' he cheerily says in another letter.

Purpose of the Ages,' she worked for a time at Assyriology, and it was this line of study which brought Professor Sayce to her house as a guest. His visit, lasting about three weeks, coincided with one of Professor Davidson's. Mr. A. L. Davidson, schoolmaster at Ruthwell, who was at that time tutor to Mrs. Morrison's son,¹ writes: 'In those days I was continually at Hetland, and much enjoyed witnessing these swordsmen'—Professor Sayce and Professor Davidson—'in combat. They fought all day and nearly all night. Mrs. Miller Morrison sent them away drives in her carriage, and they fought there. The long arguments always seemed to turn on the relations of Assyriology and Egyptology to the sacred writings. About that date Sayce had begun to retreat from certain positions which he had maintained, and it seemed to me he was always fighting a rear-guard action, and always on the defensive. My pupil's and my sympathies were all with Dr. Davidson. He had an unrivalled power of demolishing a position by effective suggestions, sometimes questions, which usually

¹ Hugh Miller, now Assistant Professor of English in King's College, Aberdeen.

brought down the whole fabric. . . . In those days I was always greatly impressed by a certain unity in A. B. D.'s life. I had used his handbooks, read his published papers, listened to him preaching, and now heard him in warm discussions, and I thought these were all of a piece. He found himself in the ministry of a Church, and willingly too, in which orthodoxy was exalted almost to a sacrament, and it appeared to me that he had such faith in Truth and Learning and growth in spiritual discernment, that the fetters laid on intellect must almost imperceptibly disappear. In Renan's Hibbert Lectures there is a sentence to this effect: Let Liberty alone, she knows how to conquer her enemy by her own unaided strength. And A. B. D. seems to have acted on this dictum.'

It is desirable to see Davidson in touch with one other scholar, who is in some ways the greatest of all. Professor Gordon of Montreal will bring them together in spirit. 'When in Göttingen,' he says, 'I found it intensely interesting to compare Davidson with Wellhausen. Of all my teachers, these two had the greatest insight, though Davidson had more delicacy, Wellhausen doubtless more

learning. They had the greatest admiration for one another. When I was preparing my paper on Jeremiah, Davidson pointed me to the pages in Wellhausen's *History* as containing more real insight than everything else on the subject put together. Wellhausen was much interested to hear this, as Robertson Smith and Davidson were the two English-speaking scholars he valued most highly, and as he himself considered these paragraphs the best in the book. Some years afterwards I sent him Davidson's *Biblical and Literary Essays*. He returned to me a warm letter of thanks, saying he had greatly enjoyed the *Essays*, especially the one on the Revised Version, the underlying humour of which must have appealed to him, for with Davidson he shared in large measure the grace of humour.'

As a scholar Davidson received the usual academic honours. In the spring of 1868 the degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on him by his own University of Aberdeen, 'in consideration of his numerous works and writings in Theology.' That degree was conferred on the same day upon George Macdonald, 'in consideration of his high literary eminence as a poet and author.' Some

weeks later Professor Davidson received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Edinburgh, and Glasgow University conferred that honour upon him in 1901, the year of her ninth jubilee. I believe that the degree which gave him the greatest pleasure was the Litt.D., which he received in June 1900 from the University of Cambridge. He was Dr. Skinner's guest on that occasion, and enjoyed the visit all the more because he was allowed to be quiet. There were one or two parties to meet him, and a reception in Westminster College, at which he declined to give an address, excusing himself to Dr. Dykes in the words of Gallifet, then French Minister of War, that the emotions of the hour would be too much for him. The oration delivered by Dr. (now Sir John) Sandys at the graduation ceremony was as follows: 'Salutamus deinceps linguæ Hebrææ in Collegio Novo inter Edinenses professorem insignem, unum ex eis quibus Veteris Testamenti in linguam nostram accuratius reddendi cura olim mandata est. Eruditionem eius testantur Grammaticæ Hebrææ principia plus quam semel edita; testantur Veteris Testamenti ex poetis et prophetis nonnulli commentariis

optimis instructi ; testatur denique Novi Testamenti ad Hebræos epistola luculenter explicata. Viro in tali præceptorem admiramur promptum et alacrem ; litterarum sacrarum interpretem sapientem, cautum, accuratum ; virum in Caledonia tota inter sapientiæ lumina iampridem numeratum. Quot discipulis stimulos et calcar addidit ! Quotiens Veteris Testamenti verba illa suo exemplo illustravit : *Sapientium verba sunt sicut stimuli, et quasi clavi penitus infixi !* Duco ad vos Professore Edinensem, Andream Bruce Davidson.'

Dr. Davidson was twice invited to deliver the Cunningham Lectures at the New College, but declined the honour. And when the University of St. Andrews asked him to become Hibbert lecturer, he refused when he found that the terms of the lectureship would debar him from doing justice to Revealed Religion.

The only Scottish scholar who did not quite appreciate Davidson seems to have been Professor A. B. Bruce of Glasgow, who had been his contemporary—three years his senior—at the New College, and whose *Training of the Twelve* and other works made all the Churches his debtors.

The two scholars first crossed swords in argument over a fine exegetical point—the interpretation of the words ‘crowned with glory and honour’ (Heb. ii. 9). In a footnote to his *Hebrews* Davidson said : ‘ It need not be argued that the glory of the Son (v. 9) and that of men (vv. 7, 10) is their glory in the heavenly world. . . . The statement “ while it is a humiliation to *die*, it is glorious to taste death *for others* ” (Prof. Bruce, *Humiliation of Christ*, p. 39), contains a fine modern idea, but one to which Scripture has hardly yet advanced. The humiliation of the Son is a “ grace ” (2 Cor. viii. 9) and a proof of love (John xv. 13, Rom. v. 8), but Scripture does not seem to have permitted to itself the paradox of calling it a glory.’¹ Seven years afterwards² Dr. Bruce returned to the point, complaining that ‘ Professor Davidson slyly pokes fun at me in a footnote.’ Davidson replied in the *Expositor*,³ where, after repeating the words of the offending footnote, he very courteously and—as most scholars agree—conclusively justifies his exegesis. I do not think that Professor Bruce received any more provocation than that innocent

¹ A. B. Davidson’s *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 59.

Expositor, III. viii. p. 373.

³ *Ibid.*, III. ix. p. 115.

footnote; but for the *Biblical World*, October 1896, he wrote an article on Professor Davidson, in which he applied to him a crowd of adjectives—raw, shrill, keen, flinty, cold, reserved, repressive, undemonstrative—and said such things as these: ‘He has not kept his place in the van of the movement which he created. He has rather lagged behind or stood on one side, while the company of the prophets marched past. . . . We look for more than banter from the acknowledged head of the Critical School in Scotland. It is not for him to select the roll of jester while the critical drama goes on.’ And the article concluded with the words, ‘Scotland must look elsewhere for its Luther; in Davidson it has at least an Erasmus.’

Dr. Bruce fortified his judgment by the opinion of Professor Cheyne, who, sure enough, before the same month was over (*Academy*, Oct. 31, 1896), came out with a very adverse notice of Dr. Davidson’s admirable little volume on *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, saying that ‘his want of grasp of principles and methods is sometimes painfully manifest,’ though Canon Cheyne feels constrained to admit that ‘he has worked hard

at his criticism, and expressed it in English which it is pleasant to read.'

As the *Biblical World* article was not exegetical but purely personal, Erasmus naturally did not reply to Luther, but two or three months later the Hebraist had occasion to review the translation of Kittel's *History of Israel* (vol. ii.), and, after giving a long list of faulty and in some instances very misleading renderings, he concluded thus : 'The translators have not been quite equal to their task, though editorial supervision should have come to their help. But the editors'—Professors Cheyne and Bruce—'like Baal, appear to have been on a journey, or peradventure sleeping.'

Of the scholar to whom Davidson's 'lack of grasp of principle and method' was so painful, one wishes to speak with gratitude and respect, for his services to Old Testament scholarship were great. But his own principles and methods led him on into so many strange positions that Budde felt compelled to say, 'Cheyne wird absurder und absurder.' And there is not an Old Testament scholar who does not regard his Jerahmeel theory as a *reductio ad absurdum* of textual and

historical criticism. Writing to Davidson from Leipzig, a New College man¹ said of Kittel: 'Professor G. A. Smith he knows from his writings, and Driver and Cheyne; he remarked with a smile that the average time for the latter to adhere to his opinions on any given point was about fourteen days.' Professor Davidson went one day into the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, when Dr. Joseph Parker was to be the special speaker, and much to his surprise heard the great preacher refer in his most grandiose manner to recent theories of the 'Origin of the Psalter,' evidently with Canon Cheyne's latest book in his mind. 'We are told,' said the deep-toned speaker, 'that certain Psalms which we have been accustomed to call Messianic—notably the 45th and the 72nd—were composed in honour of Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt. Sir, who was Ptolemy Philadelphus? Ptolemy Philadelphus was an incestuous beast!' The sound which followed in the Hall suggested the ignition of a powder magazine, and anybody who met Dr. Davidson during the rest of the day found him in a contented frame of mind. He had heard an impos-

¹ F. J. Paul, now Professor in Magee College, Londonderry.

sible theory literally exploded. Of course in his next book on the Psalms Cheyne abandoned the theory. 'I no longer hold it,' he confessed.¹ The Psalms were after all Messianic.

The truest estimate of the exegetical and other writings of Professor Davidson is that of the man who was most capable of appreciating them. After enumerating his principal works, Dr. Driver says²: 'Professor Davidson was a man of rare powers, and of still rarer qualities of mind. Whatever subject he touched, his treatment of it always displayed two qualities—it was *masterly* and it was *judicial*. No one had a greater power of penetrating to the heart of a subject ; no one was more skilful in the discovery and delineation of the characteristics of an age, the drift of an argument, the aim of a writer ; no one—witness his *Job*—could more powerfully analyse moral feeling, or exhibit the conflict of motives in a difficult moral situation. His mastery of a subject was always complete : he grasped it firmly, he saw it under all its bearings, he expounded it with clearness, and enabled his

¹ *The Christian Use of the Psalms*, p. 155.

² *The Guardian*, 1902.

reader to see it with him. His discussion of it was, moreover, always judicial. He weighs reasons, he balances opposing considerations ; he is never carried away by a brilliant but hazardous speculation ; he can distinguish the certain from the hypothetical. His native caution, shrewdness, and insight never fail him. If his final judgments seem sometimes to show indecision, it is because the indecision is warranted by the facts. His exegetical works are of the very highest quality ; one reads them with the feeling that whatever he says is the result of long and mature study, that he has considered the subject from every point of view, and applied the best available methods with the single object of getting precisely at what the author thought and meant. And so one feels that his interpretation of a difficult passage, or conclusion on a controverted question, has an antecedent presumption of being the best attainable.'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHURCHMAN

It is *prima facie* almost absurd to apply to Professor Davidson the term Churchman, yet we may do it quite advisedly. He had not what would commonly be called the Churchly mind. He did not seem to be actuated by the motives of a Churchman. It is doubtful if any public act of his could be singled out and characterised as an act of Churchmanship. And least of all did he ever dream of claiming to be a Churchman, just as none of the disciples ever presumed to call themselves the Friends of Christ, although that was the honourable name which He bestowed upon them at the end of His fellowship with them. They were His friends because they did whatsoever He commanded them, and he is the truest Churchman who best loves and serves the Church which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself. In this Ephesian sense Davidson was a very true Churchman. His voice was never heard in the

councils of his Church ; he never tabled a motion or took part in a debate ; but Professor Macphail of Madras writes : ‘ My father had a great regard for him, and I remember him speaking of a wonderful sermon which A. B. D. had given at some meeting of Presbytery—I think it was on *The Kingdom of God is within you.*’ It is because of that sermon to the Presbyters, and all it implied, that one ventures to call him a Churchman, while perfectly conscious that no one of the ordinary prefixes to the term—broad, or high, or low—had the remotest appositiveness in his case. He was a Churchman of the Invisible rather than of the Visible Church. Such a man renders to the Visible Church a service far beyond his dreams.

Davidson had two desires for ‘ the Church which is the Body of Christ, the Fulness of Him who fills the universe.’ First, that she should be holy and without blemish. He spent his days in giving to the Free Church of Scotland a succession of men whom he sought to make not only good expositors of Scripture—workmen rightly handling the Word of Truth—but also, in the Old and New Testament sense of the word,

saints. And with a touch of the old manner, which sometimes made his words all the more effective, he used to say, 'There is a reverence and joy among sinners, even yet, over the presence among them of a godly minister.'¹ His one dread was lest the New College, or any other theological hall, should send out into the world Churchmen who would dishonour the Church. In an unpublished sermon he pleads for 'a clear-cut Christianity, standing out sharp against the sky, with a chasm between it and the world.' Mr. A. B. Grant of Greenock, one of the two 'Men of the Knotted Heart,' was once touring somewhere in the Highlands with Professor Davidson as his companion. They stopped to rest and lunch at a wayside inn. In the same room of the inn two ministers, alike unknowing and unknown, were seated drinking whisky. One of them, exhilarated by the liquor he had imbibed, was arguing loudly about the steps of a certain dance, and at last got up, glass in hand, and clumsily went through certain antics which he believed to be the steps in question. Dr. Davidson said to Grant, 'That kind of thing is a proof

¹ *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 294.

of the Divine origin of Christianity. It has had to stand nineteen hundred years of that, and it is not killed.' That kind of thing ! If the words are scathing, it is because every true Churchman—be he professor or peasant—has in his heart a dream and vision of 'a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.'

His second desire for the Church was that she should be peaceful. All his life he prayed for the peace of Jerusalem. He sought peace and ensued it—made it his definite aim. He always contended that Christian men, converted from sin to holiness, animated by the spirit of Christ, can afford to differ on many things. He had unparalleled skill in communicating new truths, some of them revolutionary, with a minimum of friction. He had some forty academic generations in his classroom, and such was the force of truth in itself, and so sweetly reasonable his method of imparting it, that, almost as by a miracle, his teaching always peacefully fell as good seed into good soil. And those forty generations are now sowing beside all waters.

He believed that the famous heresy case which imperilled the peace and unity of the Church

ought to have been, and might easily have been, avoided. His critical views were essentially those of Robertson Smith, and he never personally experienced the slightest difficulty in fully persuading the men who were to form the future Church that the old faith could live peacefully with the new. And knowing well that Smith profoundly believed in Revealed Religion, he wrote to him at the beginning of the controversy, pointing out the wisdom of emphasising this fact, and adding : ' I believe that all that is needful to allay the uneasiness that prevails is that you should in some suitable way say so. It would be a great gain to be able to devote ourselves to our quiet pursuits of study, without fearing the raising of a tempest which might rage for a lifetime.' That was not only a scholar's appeal to a scholar, but a Churchman's appeal to one who, with all his splendid gifts, was somewhat lacking in Churchmanship.

And one of Dr. Davidson's very last letters was written to Professor (now Sir) G. A. Smith, with the same great longing for the peace of the Church, at the time when this scholar's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* was being

publicly discussed. And in January 1902, the month before he died, he received an answer which must have given him great satisfaction. 'I feel my duty,' wrote Dr. Smith in the course of a long letter, 'to be what you so well describe. Certainly to the Committee I will say nothing to complicate or aggravate the position. I have nothing but trust in the Committee—in their fairness and reasonableness. . . . What I mean to lay before them is the whole aim of the book, its apologetic purpose, and its repeated affirmation of belief in an authentic revelation by God of Himself and His purpose in Israel. . . . I promise you that I will endeavour to be as conciliatory as what I believe to be the truth will allow me. And, as I have said, I have nothing but respect for the Committee and its members. I trust them fully.—Ever sincerely and gratefully yours,

GEORGE ADAM SMITH.'

It is much to be regretted that the Free Church of Scotland was so late in awakening to the fact that she had in Davidson a Churchman in the best sense of the word—as true a servant of the Church as Dr. Rainy himself—and that she ought to honour him as such. Even when the truth was

pointed out to her, she merely rubbed her eyes and went to sleep again, and when she was at length broad awake, she was in the position of the Foolish Virgins.

In the summer of 1892 Dr. Peter Bayne—who gave to literature the brilliant gifts of which a voice trouble deprived the Free Church—wrote to Professor Davidson thus : ‘ It is long since you have seen my hand on paper, but I fancy that I do not need to assure you that my regard and affection for you have never cooled. In common, I suppose, with all true-hearted Scots and Free Churchmen, I look forward with keen interest to the Jubilee of the Disruption to be celebrated at next Assembly. . . . You are recognized throughout the whole English-speaking world as one of the greatest Hebrew scholars living, and your preaching is—I judge—esteemed exactly in proportion to the competence of your critics. In short there cannot be, and as a fact there is not, a shadow of doubt that you are the man who, on the merits, would be called by acclamation to the Moderator’s Chair in next Assembly. But I am assured that you “would not accept the Moderatorship under any conceivable conditions.” I cannot

convince myself that that is so. Doubtless the demand upon you would be formidable. But it lies in you to rise to a great occasion. Pardon an old and true friend for pointing out how easy it would be for you, with any length of time to prepare, to draw up a masterly address. . . . No one knows better the educational history of the Church ; you took part in the Revision Movement, and have led Free Church scholarship, imparting (in great measure) that high intellectual character to the Free Church ministry which has made them so distinguished in the British literature of the century. It would be a gloriously and sacredly honourable reward to occupy the Moderator's Chair on such an occasion ; but this you deserve. In the name of Aberdeen University and our old friendship I entreat you not to decline.—Affectionately and faithfully,

PETER BAYNE.'

Had Professor Davidson been called to the Moderator's Chair in the following spring, when he was sixty-two, with his natural strength still unabated, there is little reason to doubt that he would, though perhaps not without some fear and trembling, have loyally accepted the Church's

call. Year after year passed, however, and others were preferred in honour before him. When he was at length nominated in 1897, the proposal was carried in Committee and hailed with enthusiasm throughout the Church and far beyond it. Dr. (now Sir) W. R. Nicoll wrote to him at the time : ' I congratulate you, or rather the Free Church, on your election as Moderator. I am sure the business will not be very congenial to you ; but, if you will pardon so great a liberty, I venture to hope that you will see your way to accept. You have it in you to render a most essential service to the Church. Nothing could encourage and vitalize the whole body more than your presidency. A breach in the line of worthy and saintly old women is a crying necessity. You have an influence which you very little realize, and it is all wanted just now, for there is no denying the times are critical and the outlook not free from signs of gloom. I am writing against myself, for I have small chance of getting anything from you while this is pending, but still I am a Free Churchman with my whole heart, and I cannot but deeply wish to see you where you are so much needed. Do not be angry with me for telling you what I

feel—what all friends of the Free Church feel.—

Yours very sincerely, W. R. NICOLL.'

'It was a beautiful sight at that anxious time,' wrote Mr. John Morgan, 'to mark his genuine loyalty to his Church, and his fine and grateful appreciation of her confidence in him as a student, a teacher, a scholar. It was for a time a terrible struggle between natural inclination and his high sense of duty. At length he rose to the occasion, and resolved to sacrifice his shy and sensitive and shrinking nature, and accept the responsibility of the great occasion. But the physical and mental strain was more than he could bear. Alarming and painful symptoms of an old malady reappeared in aggravated form. A distinguished physician whom he consulted told him the Moderatorship was more than his life was worth. If only he had been equal to it, it might have formed an epoch in the Church's history as well as a landmark in the interests of Old Testament learning and literature. As it turned out, however, it was well that our Church had it in her heart to acknowledge one so distinguished and fit, for in seeking to honour him she did honour to herself.'

CHAPTER XIX

THE AGED

PROFESSOR DAVIDSON kept himself from growing old by sympathy with the young idealists around him. He loved to see the light of the rising sun in their faces. He encouraged in them the spirit of adventure, and smiled benignly upon their divine discontent with the state of the universe in general and of the Free Church in particular. Towards the end of the eighties there was a great intellectual and spiritual ferment among the New College students, the majority of whom had got out of touch with the more conservative members of the teaching staff. The Assembly's Quinquennial Visitors of that time heard some certain truths which they were requested to lay to heart. The representative of the massed students—now the foremost biologist in Scotland—dealt faithfully with dignities and powers, speaking the truth in love, and ending with a peroration to the effect that if things remained as they were it would be better

that the walls of the New College should crumble in the night. The Visitors sat as men astonished, and had only strength left in them to invoke grace, mercy, and peace upon the daring mutineers. But what good came of it at last? Great good, for that same ferment resulted, first, in the founding of the *Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly*, and, second, in a widespread agitation which led in the end, not exactly to the revision of the Confession of Faith, which was what the students desired, but to the next best thing—the passing of the Declaratory Act.

The *Review* was started in November 1886. Its object, as the projectors stated, was ‘the promotion of Scientific Theology in Scotland, and especially in the Free Church, by providing a journal for the collection and publication of results.’ While several of the professors regarded this innovation with suspicion and dread, Davidson hailed it with delight. In his opening lecture to his Senior Class in the month which witnessed the launching of the *Review*, he said : ‘We are just now in this country in a very sorry plight. We have absolutely no organ, no journal

or even paper, through which we can communicate with one another, or in which any of us can lay before others anything occurring in our reading or reflection that might interest them, or pass a judgment or criticism on any work of importance belonging to the special department with which any of us might be connected. I am glad to think that through your efforts this defect, which for a number of years has been very seriously felt, is now going to be remedied.'

With such a welcome for the new venture, the students could not fail to do their best, and as a fact they successfully edited the *Review* for five years, until it was firmly established, after which a permanent editor was found in Professor Salmond of Aberdeen, while the name was changed into *The Critical Review*. This quarterly gave Davidson a literary medium of which he gladly availed himself during the rest of his life. Professor Monteith Macphail, who was one of the student-editors, writes : ' I saw more of Davidson after I came back from India, especially in my last year, when I was editing *The Theological Review*. I shall never forget how kind he was in the way of writing reviews for that venture.

Some of them were very characteristic. I have looked up one I remember amusing me at the time—the review of the report of the Pre-Millennial Convention. It begins, “Readers of this little book will derive warmth from it but not light. It is edifying devotional reading, but incapable of being converted into ideas. It is ‘fine confused feeding,’ but no name can be given to the dish.”’ Much of Davidson’s most brilliant work is hidden in the successive numbers of the *Theological* and the *Critical*. Here he let himself go, as he was in the habit of doing in talk with congenial listeners. A selection of the weightiest and wittiest articles and critiques would, if published, have presented his latest and ripest views on nearly all the critical and theological problems of the time, whereas very much of what was extracted from his early notebooks and given to the public utterly misrepresented him.

Davidson also preserved his youth by his perennial interest in all the scholars, old and young, who were at work with him in the same fields of Biblical learning. He might know them only by their writings, but every new idea, every fresh solution, at once arrested his attention and

whetted his critical knife. And even when an opponent was removed from the field, he felt the poorer for the loss. On October 12, 1892, Ernest Renan was taken, six days after Tennyson. The first words of Davidson's first lecture to his Senior Class of that winter were these : ' The year that is fast ebbing to its close carries with it across the bar no more distinguished man than the accomplished author of the *Vie de Jésus*. His mind stood as it were at a certain angle, and the light which fell on it was reflected in colours which were sometimes fantastic, but always beautiful.'

He once said of some student of character, ' He analyses with a hatchet.' His own critical instrument was the finest lancet, and when he had to smite, the weapon of his warfare was not a bludgeon but a rapier or a Damascene blade. ' A few years before his death,' writes Hugh Falconer, ' I visited Davidson's classroom, and found the clear mind delighting a new generation with its brilliance and keenness of edge. In a preface to his lecture on Amos, whom he claimed as a witness to the historicity of the early Hebrew tradition, he referred to a recent book by Dr. Cheyne, who ventured to assert, among other things, that if

Dr. Robertson Smith had lived a few years longer, he would have regarded Moses as a purely legendary figure. After a scathing rebuke of this irreverence to the memory of an illustrious scholar, Davidson let his irony play with withering effect on Cheyne's position, and concluded thus : " This critic, chameleon-like, has reflected in succession critical opinions of every colour and complexion. In him there is no continuance. Contrasting Moses with Dr. Cheyne, we may certainly say that Moses at least *persists*." "

In later years some of Davidson's students began to speak of him as ' the Rabbi.' The title was singularly malaprop, though the affectionate tone in which it was uttered concealed to some extent the error. Many of us could never use it. Our master was and is ' Davidson,' while the initials A. B. D. became as dear to not a few Scotsmen as even R. L. S. To Dr. Duncan, with his absent-minded ways and stores of doubtfully profitable learning, the name ' Rabbi ' was fitting enough, but no teacher was ever less Rabbinical than Davidson. I think it was Zinzendorf who suggested that it was part of Jesus' humiliation state in early years to have his head filled with

Rabbinical rubbish. Among the Jews the word Rabbi has, it is true, been a title of respect since the first century B.C., but it has always referred to Doctors of the Law, and 'in modern Jewish use it is properly applied to one who is authorized by ordination to deal with questions of law and ritual.'¹ Now law and ritual were things in which Davidson had only an exceedingly remote interest. His achievement as an Old Testament scholar was that he shifted the centre of gravity from the Law to the Prophets. Outside the Jewish community the title Rabbi is given to 'one whose learning, authority, or office is comparable to that of a Jewish rabbi (frequently contemptuous).'² One is therefore not surprised to find that the instinctive aversion to calling Davidson 'Rabbi' was shared by all his best pupils. For instance, Sir George Adam Smith writes: 'Give no countenance to the name of "Rabbi" which his later students gave him. A more inappropriate title for such a man was never conceived. He was the last man to be called it.' If any student had ever ventured to name him 'Rabbi' to his face, he would either have ended the matter

¹ Murray's *New English Dictionary*.

² *Ibid.*

with a swift 'Be *not* ye called Rabbi,' or else have covered the unfortunate disciple with confusion by asking, 'Who were they that loved the chief seats in the synagogue, and salutations in the market-place, and to be called of men Rabbi?'

In March 1896 the New College Theological Society met to celebrate its jubilee. About one hundred and twenty honorary members and many distinguished guests were present. Principal Rainy, the Chairman, was naturally the central figure, and there were many speeches, but 'Davidson,' says Dr. Stalker, 'seemed to monopolize the applause. His was certainly the speech of the evening.' The toast of the Professors was proposed by Dr. D. M. Ross, who remarked that the Hebrew Professor was the cause of more idolatry than the Kings of Israel. In replying Davidson said it was no doubt a time for genial hyperbole. But Professors did not count for much on such an occasion, and felt a little like the father when the baby was handed round. Instead of the fathers shall be the children. The New College was a nursery of Professors : he remembered four years which produced four of them—Veitch, Douglas, Laidlaw, and Dods. Who did sin,

these men or their parents, that they became Professors ? But look narrowly at Professors, and you find that they all grow old. And it could not be denied that a certain intellectual weariness was apt to creep over the worker after the lapse of a number of years. The main and sufficient stimulus was in each successive group of students and in the presentation of truth to new minds.

On the night of the banquet given to Dr. Rainy just before the Union in October 1900, Davidson's speech, says Dr. Stalker, 'proved a failure ; he seemed to be put out by the extraordinary brilliance of Dr. Watson, who preceded him. Yet that night he said one of the most characteristic things I ever heard from his lips. He remarked that he had been made to realize how remarkable the history of the New College had been ; indeed, its greatness was manifest the moment one reflected on it ; yet somehow he had never thought of it before : one simply went in and out and did one's work ; it was all in the day's duty, and there was no more to be said about it. . . . There was the man—so simple and unpretending.'

In those days he had many opportunities,

some of which he still readily seized, of keeping in touch with his old students and their churches. 'I asked him,' says the minister of Juniper Green, 'if he would come out and baptize my little daughter. He was taken aback at the idea. An old dried-up bachelor like him to baptize a child! He came, and preached on Peter walking to Christ on the water. When his voice fell to the tremolo, it was wonderfully touching and impressive. He laid no vows upon me. It was a baptismal service of rare delicacy. So charmed was my wife with it, that the thought rose in her to bring the child into the study after lunch that he might plant a kiss on the tiny face.' He loved the other sacrament even more. A Communion Address at the church of Rathen, where his sister worshipped, was from the words Eph. i. 3-4. 'He said,' writes the minister, 'that Paul himself came to wonder so much at his own conversion, that he had to go back behind it to find its cause in God. This was not so much a doctrine to be preached, as the one and only satisfying explanation to a man himself. I thought I detected a touch of autobiography in the address. He seemed to go back over his own life, and especially

over his spiritual history, and like Paul he felt there were so many things which came there not by his own asking, but through God's infinite love, that elective choice alone could explain it. He knew that such a work of grace came unsought and unmerited into the disciple's life, that we must go back behind our own thinking and seeking and asking to the love of our father God.' ¹

John Stuart Blackie, his teacher of Latin at Marischal College, lived to be nearly fourscore and six, and his relations with his old pupil were always cordial. His last letter to him—half a dozen lines in a very feeble hand—indicates this. It evidently enclosed another letter which is lost. 'My dear D.D.,' he wrote, 'you are the boy to answer this letter, not poor Blackie. I have written to him to expect a learned answer from you.—Sincerely yours, J. S. BLACKIE.'

In the last year of the century Dr. Davidson decided to leave the house in Rillbank Terrace where he had lived since 1864. The 'residents' had tried in vain to prevent the building of a hospital laundry, with a high chimney, at the

¹ J. S. Stewart, now of Aberdeen.

head of the street. This was an eyesore to the neighbourhood, making it look like a manufacturing district. Dr. Davidson purchased a house in Corrennie Gardens, near the foot of the Braid Hills, and his removal thither made a delightful change in the quiet evening of his life. 'The house I have bought,' he wrote to his niece, 'is a new house, with electric light and all modern appliances. It is of course too big for me, but when you come down in summer it will be full. I think it is so nice that I will not envy you your house any more.' Thereupon he proceeds to describe it with evident satisfaction, dwelling particularly upon the fine views to east and west from the upper rooms. The tramcar would take him in to his classes daily, or a walk would do him good.

His niece had married a doctor with a large practice in Bolton, where Dr. Davidson presented her with a fine house, which he 'envied' her until he had purchased that equally good one for himself. In 1900 Dr. Ogilvie died, leaving Helen a widow with five children. When Dr. Davidson begged her to return to him, she naturally shrank from filling his house with a babel of children's

voices. But he said to her—though not of course in so many words—‘Suffer the little children to come unto me.’ And any one who visited him during the last two years of his life might find him with a book in his hand and a slumbering child in her cot beside him. His sense of the mystery of all child-life was well known to his friends. ‘I remember,’ writes Arthur Taylor, ‘once walking to the New College with him after a fall of snow. Suddenly he stopped, while his lips twitched and his eyes sparkled as he pointed with his stick to the imprint of a little footstep in the snow and exclaimed, “Oh, what a tiny little foot!”’ Like Charles Lamb, he had doubtless many a reverie of dream children. ‘We are nothing, less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name.’ So it was a new and a passing strange experience to come daily home to a house filled with real children. ‘I think,’ writes Helen, ‘that he was happy in those years. I know he used to sing as he came up from the tram.’

As he grew older, Edinburgh became, I believe,

dearer to him than ever. No one delighted more than he in the pageant of Princes Street at four in the afternoon. It was one of the students' pleasures to go down and lift their hats to him in the fashionable promenade, glad at heart that the friend of the Old Testament Prophets was not all antiquary. He was not so picturesque a figure as Professor Blackie, who was so often to be seen walking along that street, with kail-runt and plaid, making his own breeze ; but he was equally beloved by his students. And then there was always the possibility of meeting in that street some former New College man, up from a remote parish or glen to attend a committee meeting. The following might have been written by any one of a score of men : ' I remember meeting him in Princes Street. He linked his arm in mine, and walked all along the street with me, asking all about my Church and my work.' ¹

Nothing delighted him more than to hear of the weddings of his old students. He regarded St. Paul as the greatest of all Christians, but it was quite apparent that he did not accept the apostle's

¹ Rev. James Johnstone, of Lochranza, now of Strathpeffer.

ascetic, or rather eschatological, views on the subject of marriage. On the contrary, he counselled all his former students, in reference to the great adventure of life, *not* to 'abide even as I.' And it was the height of happiness to him if one of them came to introduce his bride. 'The last time I saw him,' writes Professor Gordon, 'was in the summer of 1901. I had just become engaged to the lady who is now my wife. She used to meet Davidson in Elie, while quite a young girl ; in fact, she and her playmates on the sands used to make him their "den" ! So we thought it but fitting to make him a partner in our happiness. We spent a charming hour together in his study, had tea and talk of the most trivial description ; then we went off with his blessing. As we passed down the stairs, he patted me on the back, and whispered, "You're a wise man." Poor dear Davidson !'

But if ever any of his men ventured to lay a trifle too much stress upon the greater happiness of Benedict, they found an easy match. One of his students, after the lapse of half a score of years, met him in Princes Street, and, as they walked together, gratified him with details of

this, that, and the other member of his class. All the men were well remembered, and the narrator took a humorously malicious pleasure in rounding off each case with the words, 'And, Professor, he's married!' Finally the speaker said of himself, 'And, Professor, I'm married!' 'Well,' rejoined Davidson, with the twinkle of summer lightning behind his glasses, 'with all this marrying and giving in marriage, I hope you'll not bring another Flood upon us!'

Towards the end of the century his letters contain occasional references to his old heart trouble, of which he tried to make light. 'My eyes,' he writes, 'feel stiff always, which I suspect to be due to the irregular action of the heart. But I dare say there is nothing seriously wrong.' The sudden flush of his face, which all his students and friends remember as characteristic, was really a symptom of the heart affection.

In his last period he had more students from abroad than ever. In the closing year of the century, for example, he had about twenty Irishmen. One of them writes: 'We were all tickled at the way in which one of our number, a man from the city of Cork, was continually asked

up to read in the class. It certainly was not because this man knew his work badly, for he was the best prepared and the most conscientious among us. We all said that the Professor liked to hear the sweet Cork accent, and that it gave him genuine pleasure when he had our brother on his feet.'

Let this Cork man¹ describe the Professor to us in the final sessions. 'Those were memorable years. Great things were happening—the South African War, the Union of the Scottish Churches, the passing of the nineteenth century, the death of Queen Victoria. These events seemed big to us as students and moved us deeply, but they were not bigger than the events which were passing in our inner life. We were living in a transition period, but I sometimes think that the shock was felt more keenly about the period to which I refer. During the past fifteen years many books have been written which have helped to make things clear even to popular readers. As theological students we at least felt that we were up against great problems which stirred us to the depths, and we shall ever be grateful to Almighty God

¹ Rev. G. Faris, now minister of Caledon.

for the great men at whose feet we sat and who led us into the truth. . . . There were giants in Edinburgh in those days, and by universal consent Davidson was the greatest. . . . When I returned to Edinburgh in the autumn of 1900 great changes had taken place in the New College. More classrooms had been added, evidently in preparation for the influx of students which was expected after the Union. We found that Davidson's quarters were shifted. His new classroom was much larger. I wonder if he felt quite at home in it. It was so new and modern, and had not yet acquired that collegiate atmosphere which characterized the room in the older part of the building where we had been accustomed to see him. It was a large class that year. I think I see the Professor walking in with manuscript in hand. I remember his momentary glance upon the class as he summoned us to prayer. The students used to say that other Professors talked with the Deity but that Davidson prayed. It was only a student's way of putting it, but his prayers were so full of tenderness and humility and penitence, and they were spoken with such intensity of emotion. . . . As he lectured on the

Prophets he seemed to enter with his whole being into a sympathetic understanding of them. At times his voice rose to a high pitch, and then it fell away into softer and tenderer tones as he sorrowed with them in their moments of loneliness and failure. I think the yearning appeals of Hosea found a very responsive chord in his heart. . . . Though approaching seventy years of age at the time of which I write, Dr. Davidson did not appear to me to show any signs of intellectual decay. What struck me perhaps most of all was that, allied with his intellectual greatness—and I suppose he was the foremost Oriental scholar of his day—there was a simple, child-like heart, and a nature almost feminine in its tenderness.'

At the opening of the New College session of 1901-2, Canon (now Bishop) Gore delivered an admirable address on Christian Union. He explained that one reason for his desire to present his views in that place was his reverence for its famous teacher. And every one knew that at least to the union of two such minds there could be no impediment. They had fellowship in 'the esoteric Church of the illuminated.'

In homelier language, such as the mother of one of them often used, they were both 'far ben.' 'Life in God and union there' was the motto of Saint Monica. As the angel of the Ecclesia Mystica there is always a mother in the background, well content to be unseen.

Early in 1902 Dr. Davidson wrote an Introduction and brief Notes to Isaiah for the *Temple Bible*, of which Mr. Oliphant Smeaton was general editor. This little volume was afterwards described in the *Union Magazine* as the gem of the series. On Friday, February 22nd, he lectured to his classes. His students had been invited to spend the following Tuesday evening at his house, and some of his young lady friends had promised to come and entertain them. On Saturday he spent the morning hours correcting the last proofs of Isaiah, and then he proposed a walk into town. He was very happy as he went along—how could he be otherwise with Helen of the fourth generation, a bright and animated girl of seventeen, beside him? When she bowed to a friend who raised his hat in passing, and mentioned his name, he pretended to be jealous. 'Where,' he asked, 'did you first meet Mr.

Sneakie—oh, I beg your pardon—Mr. Geikie ?' They promenaded Princes Street, and when she had done her shopping they turned their faces homeward, March and September—not October or anything later—keeping sweet company.

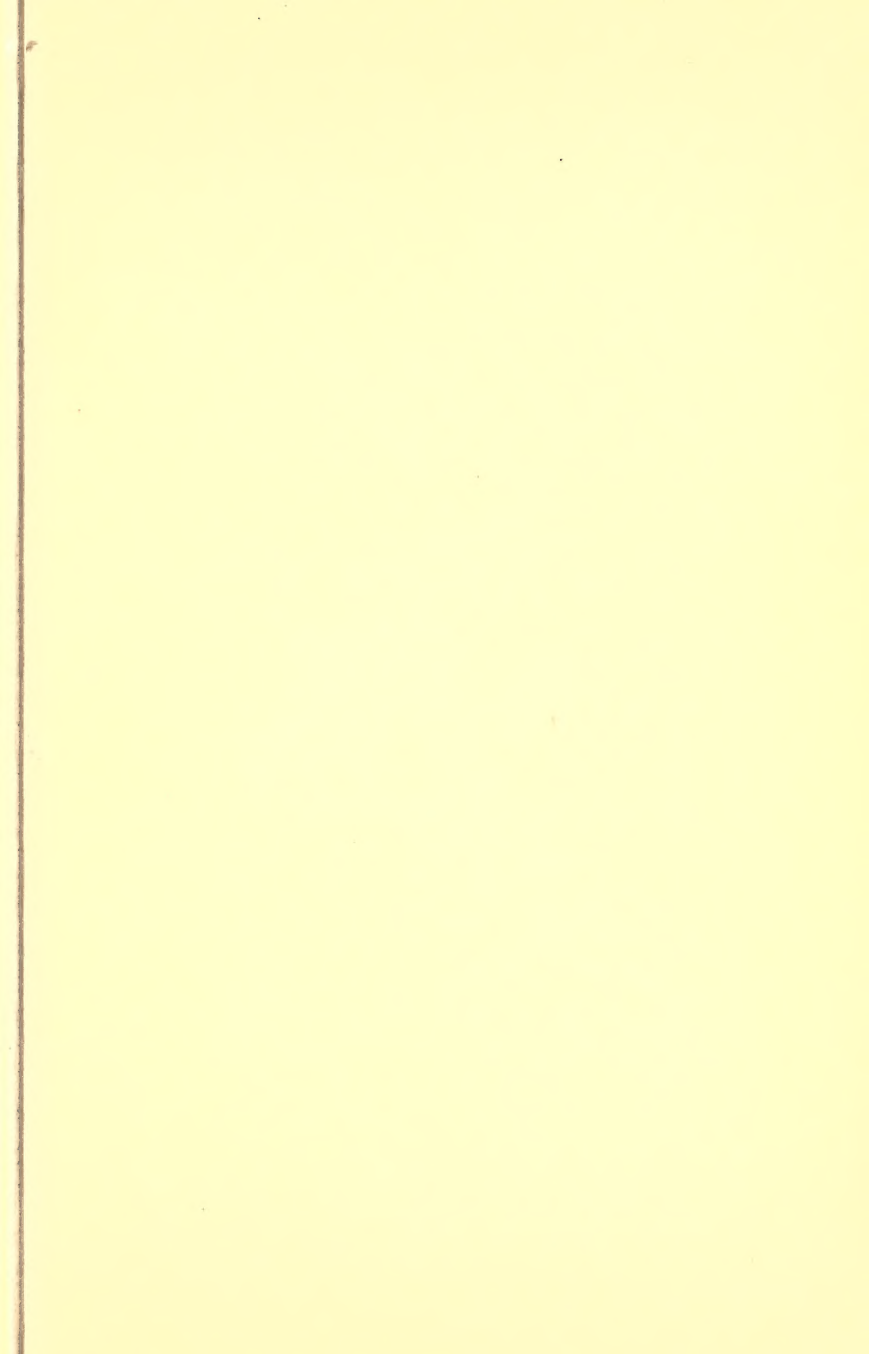
After evening prayers, when the children had gone to sleep, he and his niece sat together in quiet, intimate talk. He took one more look at rapt Isaiah, and retired to rest. At eight next morning he rose and dressed, being—who can doubt ?—in the spirit on the Lord's Day. Suddenly he complained of a pain in his back, and put his hand to his side, as he had so often done, even in days long past. And in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he was changed. He was absent from the body, and present with the Lord. Next morning the wires and papers carried the tidings to his students in the manses. And some days later William Cormack, the friend of his boyhood, heard on the African veldt. 'While walking one morning,' he says, 'in bright sunshine, the news of his sudden death reached me. It was as if a dark cloud had dimmed the brightness of the African sun.'

Professor Sanday of Oxford, England's greatest New Testament scholar, sent a laurel wreath to place on the bier of Scotland's greatest Old Testament scholar. And the students of the dead master laid him to rest in the Grange beside Chalmers. The inscription on the tombstone is : 'To the memory of Andrew Bruce Davidson, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis, New College, Edinburgh, 1863-1902. Scholar, Teacher, Friend. באורך נראה אור.'

The Hebrew words, so dear to him, mean 'In Thy light shall we see light.' He never vilified the faculty of reason, which is the candle of the Lord within us. But he taught, like Butler, that reason 'can afford no light where it does not shine, nor judge where it has no principles to judge upon.' He realised that men's hearts and consciences are dark, their duties and deeds are dark, the very constitution of the world and even the Sacred Scriptures are dark, except as seen in the light of God. He lived through an age of brilliant researches, brilliant discoveries, brilliant criticism, and the career of the crofter's child who became the finest scholar and teacher

of his land and time may be called brilliant. But the light of all his seeing was a light that never was on sea or land, save in the Life which is, as he believed, the light of all worlds. His spirit reached its full height in seeking with the Prophets, and finding with the Apostles, the light of perfect goodness. No man ever more cordially set his seal to the great words, 'God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'





ACW-8545

CAVEN LIBRARY
KNOX COLLEGE
TORONTO

KNOX COLLEGE LIBRARY

